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Middle East Diary

BOOKS BY
NOEL COWARD

MIDDLE EAST DIARY

Autobiography:
PRESENT INDICATIVE

Short Stories:
TO STEP ASIDE

Plays:

BLITHE SPIRIT
CURTAIN CALLS
TONIGHT AT 8:30

POINT VALAINE: *A Play in Three Acts*

CONVERSATION PIECE: *A Romantic Comedy*

PLAY PARADE

DESIGN FOR LIVING: *A Comedy in Three Acts*

CAVALCADE: *A Play in Three Acts*

POST-MORTEM: *A Play in Eight Scenes*

PRIVATE LIVES: *An Intimate Comedy in Three Acts*

BITTER SWEET: *A Play in Three Acts*

THE VORTEX: *A Play in Three Acts*

HAY FEVER: *A Light Comedy in Three Acts*

"THIS WAS A MAN": *A Comedy in Three Acts*

EASY VIRTUE: *A Play in Three Acts*

Sketches:

COLLECTED SKETCHES AND LYRICS

Parodies:

SPANGLED UNICORN

NOEL COWARD

Middle East Diary



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Foreword

THE following pages are extracts from the daily diary that I kept from July to October 1943. I have found it necessary, here and there, to cut out some of the more obvious repetitions. With the exception of these and a few—a very few—afterthoughts the original diary remains intact.

The book is dedicated, proudly and with gratitude, to the fighting services and hospital staffs in North Africa and the Middle East.

NOEL COWARD

Middle East Diary

'July —

The town presents a gallant façade to the sea; you'd never think, looking at those grey houses spreading over the hills, that so much devastation lay behind. We sailed at about five forty-five, along the front; it was a lovely evening and the whole scene looked like a not very good modern water-colour, not very good because everything was too clearly marked and accurate and all the light and shadow effects were so correct and nicely done. There were lots of people walking about and among them I seemed to see ghosts of myself at various times for I have been a good deal to the place during the last two years. I saw myself dashing back and forth to the Grand Hotel when, in the summer of 1941, I was doing a little light work for the Royal Naval Film Corporation, and later, with Ronnie Neame and the camera crew when we were taking 'stills' for 'In Which We Serve,' and, later still, just two weeks ago strolling along with Joyce and Bert [Joyce Carey, Herbert Lister] when we were playing 'Present Laughter' and 'This Happy Breed' at the Palace.

Many other memories too dropped into my mind, myself when very young during the last war, bicycling over from a nearby rectory with John Ekins to go to a matinee

at the Theatre Royal and have tea in the Palm Court afterwards. There is no Theatre Royal and no Palm Court left now and John Ekins was dead a year later. This war has dealt cruelly with the poor old town but its intrinsic quality is unchanged. I remembered too many arrivals and departures on transatlantic liners, usually the French Line. Above all I remembered sitting on my verandah in the Grand Hotel in the summer of 1941 and watching the people of the town in the evening sunlight. During that summer they were having raids practically every night but they went about gaily until the last minute before blackout. I remember feeling immensely proud on their behalf and wishing that our enemies, and some of our friends too for the matter of that, could have seen them. I am sentimentally glad that this town is the last bit of England that I shall be seeing for some time.

It feels strange to be starting off again and leaving England behind. I hope I shall get through these various journeyings safely because I do so much want to see the end of the war. The familiar naval magic has already taken charge of me; I wander about, clamber up on to the bridge whenever I feel like it, stamp up and down the quarter deck, have drinks in the wardroom and make jokes and feel most serenely at home. This is unquestionably a happy ship; I felt it immediately when I came on board with the Captain this afternoon. He is a nice man, and has the usual perfect manners of the Navy. He has turned his cabin over to me as he will of course be using his sea cabin during the voyage. I am looked after by

his steward, who is also typical, having been in the service most of his life except for a few years before the war when he retired. Now he has been yanked back again and seems, on the whole, to be more pleased than not. He has what we would describe in the theatre as a 'dead pan' but there is a glint of humour in his eye.

I am an honorary member of the wardroom and am to take my meals there, which will be gayer than sitting in lonely state in the Captain's cabin. The ship's officers seem to be a good lot, mostly quite young and a lot of R.N.V.R.'s among them. Just before dinner the Commander gave me a few casual instructions: (a) To wear my 'Mae West' all the time (I pointed out that he wasn't wearing his and he laughed gaily), (b) That in the event of any submarine alarms and excursions the best place to make for was the bridge where there is more to be seen, and (c) That if there should be a sudden loud bang and a violent list either to port or starboard I must pop out on to the quarter deck immediately and make for the nearest Carley float of which I am also an honorary member; there, he added, I had better wait until the order came to abandon ship.

After dinner I went on to the quarter deck for a little and watched the sea swishing by; it was quite calm and there was still twilight but the land had disappeared. In all my travels there have always been certain moments which stick in my memory and this, I am sure, will be one of them. I have sailed away so many times from so many different lands nearly always with a slight feeling of regret mixed with exhilaration. This time

there was a subtle difference. I had been in England for over two years, a long while for me ever to stay in one place, and except for a brief trip to Iceland with Joe Vian [Rear Admiral Sir Philip Vian, K.B.E., D.S.O.] in August 1941, and a few days in destroyers here and there I have been with the Navy very little since the war. I felt aware, strongly aware, of the change in atmosphere, the switch over from peace-time, show-the-flag, spit-and-splendour efficiency, to this much grimmer, alert feeling of preparedness permeating the whole ship.

The engines were throbbing, we were doing about twenty-two knots, and the wake churned away into the gathering darkness and I had a sudden impulse to shout very loudly with sheer pride and pleasure and excitement. I restrained this impulse out of consideration for some ratings who were sharing with me the beauties of the evening. I looked up at the stars and back at the dark sea. I looked back also over the last two years with a feeling of detachment as though I were watching a sort of personal newsreel, badly cut and incoherent; tremendous events and insignificant personal happenings all jumbled together without the slightest selective taste. The early despairs and difficulties of preparing 'In Which We Serve'—sitting with Gladys in Pine Cottage listening miserably to the B.B.C. announcement of the fall of Singapore which had been prefaced, I hope appropriately, by 'I'll See You Again'—standing with Lorn amid the chaos of my studio in Gerald Road which had been blitzed the night before with me in it—

drinking in the year 1943 (heavily) with the Gordon Highlanders in Aberdeen—the first night of ‘Blithe Spirit’ when the smart West End audience had to pick their way over bomb craters to get into the theatre—bleak moments in provincial towns during my tour, trudging back to hotels through the blackout and the rain—troop concerts and factory concerts in the Midlands—showing the King and Queen over Denham Studios—convalescing after jaundice in Tintagel and looking out at nothing but gorse, cliffs and sea—the gala première of ‘In Which We Serve’ and the very ‘gala’ eight weeks’ season at the Haymarket.

A crowded two years all right, now slipping away over the stern and becoming part of the past. The immediate future held out prospects of being even more exciting, perhaps almost too exciting! I took a deep, affectionate sniff of ozone and went to bed. We pick up our convoy to-morrow.

July —

When I woke this morning I looked out of the scuttle and there was the convoy; grey ships, grey sky and grey sea, not a scrap of colour anywhere.

Made a tour of the lower deck with the Padre in course of which I signed a lot of pay-books and ‘best girl’s’ photographs, shook a lot of hands and had several tots of rum from everybody’s mugs.

There was some excitement early this morning; apparently a Junkers 88 suddenly popped out of the clouds

at us. We opened fire at once and it beetled off. I was sleeping at the time with 'Quies' stuffed into my ears and heard none of it.

The Commander has a perpetual twinkle in his eye and speaks excellent, rather ironic English with a slight drawl. When I asked him about identifying aircraft he explained that the only one he had ever been able to identify was the small model Focke-Wulf attached to the mainmast and even this, he added, was only because of the knots that tied it on. This inadequacy of his he described as 'lamentable'!

All the evening there was tension on the bridge because an enemy aircraft had been reported to be somewhere in the area, but nothing happened. My steward takes a pessimistic view whenever possible. He looked gloomily out of the scuttle this afternoon and said: 'I hope we shall get *this* lot through all right,' as though there were very little chance of it.

On the quarter deck before dinner I had an intense conversation about sex, war, marriage and life-in-the-raw with 'Torps' (aged twenty-eight) and another young officer (aged twenty-six) who is athirst for knowledge and is forcing himself to like classical music. He turned on the radio after dinner and listened to the London Symphony Orchestra playing Rossini after which a lady proceeded with great enthusiasm to sing the 'Bell Song' from 'Lakme.' This shook him rather and he gave up. (I think it was 'Lakme' but it might have been 'Dinorah'.)

Having, in course of conversation yesterday, told the

pilot and the Commander about a dreadfully hearty man in New Zealand who used to greet me regularly with—‘How are we this merry morn?’ and ‘Good morrow, kind sir’ I have obviously laid up trouble for myself. They pursue me with these phrases incessantly.

Finished the day with a cup of ship’s cocoa in the sick bay and a long, at moments gruesome, medical discussion with the P.M.O., who couldn’t be nicer. I stumbled off to bed down ladders and under bulging hammocks at about midnight.

July —

The weather is still grey. I was very touched to realise that the ship sailing along nearest to us is an old friend of mine. It was in her that I met Daan [Daan Hu-breht] at Port Said when he was returning from Java in 1931. It was also in her that I sailed away from Singapore in 1936 and, during the voyage home, evolved the idea of ‘To-night at Eight Thirty.’ The first play of the series that I wrote was ‘Fumed Oak,’ actually one of the most successful, and there was the cabin in which I wrote it, only a few hundred yards away. The ship of course had changed her personality; she was no longer a stately Dutch luxury liner but a grey, purposeful-looking creature filled with troops. There, crowded now with khaki figures, was the promenade deck round which I had been pursued by the overanxious mother who ultimately inspired ‘Don’t Put Your Daughter on the Stage, Mrs. Worthington.’ There too was the bridge

upon which I had stood waving an R.A.F. pennant while the Singapore air squadrons flew over to bid me farewell.

In the afternoon all greyness disappeared and the sun came out, the air became distinctly warmer and I lay on the quarter deck on the Commander's camp bed in a pair of shorts and watched the sea getting bluer and bluer. This idyllic peace was shattered by 'action stations' being sounded and the announcement that a hostile group of aircraft were coming in to attack us. Everybody flew to their stations, I dashed into my cabin, hurled my clothes on, collected my binoculars, tin hat, morphine, 'Mae West,' ear plugs, etc., and was on the bridge inside of two minutes keyed up for death and destruction only to discover that the group of hostile aircraft had diminished into one amiable Catalina. I returned to the quarter deck, stripped again and relaxed.

The Commander had the 'Malta Convoy' film run through for me in the men's recreation room. A terrifying picture. This ship was the only one that got through without casualties. Out of a convoy of fifteen merchant ships only five got into harbour and one of these was bombed and sunk when she got there. The photography was excellent but the commentary rather tiresome, too much of 'our brave sailor lads' stuff. God knows it's difficult to describe courage and gallantry but it must not be done with unctuous clichés.

July —

A lovely morning, clear and sunny, and the sea still calm. At about eleven o'clock I went on to the bridge to say good morning to the Captain and I hadn't been there two minutes when a great deal of excitement started. First of all an enemy aircraft was observed circling round the convoy, then a submarine was reported on the starboard beam. Intense activity set in immediately. I was given a tin hat by the Commander as I had left mine in my cabin; we watched two escort vessels dropping depth charges, a dramatic sight with the spray shooting hundreds of feet into the air. We dropped behind the convoy and proceeded to attack the aircraft; the din was terrific and the heat of the gunfire from B mounting just below the bridge scorched my neck. I felt singularly detached and almost expected to hear David's [David Lean] voice saying 'Cut.' It all seemed much further from reality than 'In Which We Serve.' I fell automatically into my 'Captain D' postures, and it was only with a great effort that I restrained myself from pushing the Captain out of the way and shouting orders down the voice pipes. We didn't hit the aircraft, I regret to say, but our shooting was straight and it disappeared into some clouds. I came below to fetch my coat as it was a bit nippy on the bridge. To me, the most depressing part of action at sea is the closing up of the ship. It feels gloomy and lonely and scarifying. I returned to the bridge but nothing further was happen-

ing, there was no news of the submarine and all the excitement was over so, after standing about a bit, I went down to the wardroom, had a drink and some lunch and then, inevitably, went to sleep.

After tea I went along with the young Lieutenant who wishes to like good music to the E.R.As' mess. They were a bit shy at first but warmed up after a little and conversation flowed and they plied me with questions about 'In Which We Serve.' They wanted to know how much time I had had to spend in the water and was it real oil fuel or not and countless other things. They were all delighted with the fact that the lower deck had been presented in the film not as comic relief but as an integral and vital part of the story. I asked them if they had any technical criticisms to make and they had none, which of course was gratifying.

July —

I am giving a show to the troops this afternoon so I spent the morning going over lyrics in my mind and writing a new topical naval refrain for 'Let's Do It.' I expect Cole [Cole Porter] will forgive me. After lunch I sunbathed. No enemy annoyances and a clear sky. One of the escort vessels dropped a few depth charges but, I think, merely for the devil of it.

At five o'clock I gave my show in the recreation room. At my special request there were no officers present; in a confined space it is always much better to have the men by themselves. The piano was unbelievably

vile but they were a wonderful audience, eager to enjoy everything. I went on for forty minutes.

Before dinner the entire wardroom got into a literary argument in the middle of which the Captain's secretary, with eyes blazing, went into a tirade against Kipling. He shouted, 'Tripe! Tripe!' with great violence and I couldn't have been more astonished as he is a delicate-looking boy of twenty-two, very retiring and very, very Scotch, who up to that moment had never uttered. I had a long talk with him later and discovered that he has a degree at the Edinburgh University, that he can read Greek, Latin and French as well as he can English, that he has read practically everything there is to read of poetry and literature and that he disdains modern novels. Incidentally he went through the lower deck before becoming an officer. He confessed that at one time he had worked himself into a nervous breakdown. What an extraordinarily mixed bag the modern Navy is! When he gets leave and comes to London I shall take him along to Winnie's [Clemence Dane] and they can ramp about among obscure English essayists and have a fair beano.

July —

Well, well, well! Mussolini has resigned! Of all pompous demagogues there is the one who has personally irritated me most. For years I have writhed at that over-acting, jowly face and those silly little legs. I remember seeing him at the Stadium in Rome on the occasion of

some sort of athletic display. On that day he had, unwisely, elected to squeeze himself into a white uniform and his vast face brooded over the top of it like an enormous purple dahlia.

I gave another show at five o'clock for the troops that couldn't be there yesterday and, in the evening, after dinner, that vilest of all vile pianos was carted into the wardroom and I sang and played practically everything I could remember. Personally I felt that I went on far too long but they seemed to want me to. When I had finally played my last chord and sung my last note, the Commander got up and said: 'I had prepared a very flowery and "ormulu" speech of thanks to Noel Coward but I won't embarrass either him or you by saying it because I suddenly remembered that in the Navy he is one of us and he will be the first to understand that we never thank our own people.' I shall become a bore if I go on any more about the perfect manners of the Navy but I must put on record that that was the most graceful and courteous compliment I have ever had in my life.

July —

We are arriving at Gibraltar to-night. The convoy has split in two; one half is going on to Freetown and the Cape and the other half through the Mediterranean. With heartless insouciance we are abandoning both halves and going cracking off on our own. As we turned, in the early morning light, the ships of the convoy

cheered us. It was a touching moment, sentimental in the best sense, just another of those countless small rituals that decorate the lives of the men and ships who serve the sea. I hung out of my scuttle feeling the increased vibration beneath my feet as we heightened speed, and watching all those grey ships dwindling into the hazy distance.

I had a long talk with the Captain on the bridge. He is a highly intelligent man and doesn't miss a trick. He has been a submariner most of his life and we discussed many things ranging from the loss of the 'Thetis' to post-war reconstruction in Europe. We also touched on politics, Munich and the China Seas. He had clear, alert views on the most diverse subjects and, before I knew it, nearly two hours had passed and it was time to go down to the wardroom for a gin.

I spent the hour before dinner saying good-byes. In the warrant officers' mess we exchanged verses and toasts. I always hate leaving a ship much more than a town or a country.

The light and colour were wonderful as we drew near Gibraltar. The sun was low in the sky and it picked out in strong relief the coloured houses and the ships in the harbour. I could identify the Mount with its white walls and Bougainvillea, and the Rock Hotel set like a piece of yellow cake half way up the hill. Government House was lost among the buildings of the town but you could see where it was by the trees in the garden. As we sailed through the 'gate' our ship's band began to play on the quarter deck; the sound came wafting up over the ship

to the bridge and I realised that a final assault was being made upon my affection and my emotion. They were playing the 'Bittersweet' waltz.

After several valedictory drinks I dined with the Captain in the wardroom and, at about nine forty-five, went ashore with him.

John [Squadron Leader John Perry] met me and drove me to Government House. By this time darkness had fallen and it felt strange and exhilarating to be driving through lighted streets again; also the air was warm, really warm, and everything smelt of summer.

Mason-Mac [General Sir Noel Mason-Macfarlane, K.C.B., D.S.O., M.C.] was in fine form and very welcoming and, after we had chatted for a bit and I had dutifully delivered various messages from Islay and Mona, [Lady and Miss Mason-Macfarlane] he rushed me off to a mixed officers' and Wrens' dance. This didn't last long because curfew is at eleven o'clock and everybody has to go home. Back in Government House again we had a nightcap and, inevitably, slipped into reminiscence of those early months of the war in France which seemed now to be so far away. We recalled, with appropriate nostalgia, some of our fortnightly evenings in Paris and, with less nostalgia but considerable hilarity, our rather pompous propaganda meetings with the professors in the Commissariat d'Information. Arras too; conferences at trestle tables with maps on the wall and momentous luncheons in that hideous little private room at the Hôtel de l'Univers. Nostalgia reared itself up here again because the Hôtel de l'Univers really was pretty

sweet and is now blasted out of existence. I told him about a poem I had received just after the fall of France from a highly emotional lady. The poem started with the line: 'France, France, what have you done?' The flat querulousness of this made us laugh but I think our laughter was a little sad.

July —

Breakfast at eight-thirty. The household consists of Tony Quaile, John Perry, David Woodford, Miller Stirling and Captain Lang. The latter looks as though he had been pressed closely for years in a very old book. After breakfast I sent some reassuring cables home to my loved ones and then went up to the Rock Hotel with John to visit the concert party. There they all were, Beatrice Lillie, Dorothy Dickson, May Craven, Kay Young, Vivien Leigh, Nicholas Phipps, Richard Hadyn and Leslie Henson. All deeply sunburned and bubbling with their experiences in North Africa. Binkie [Hugh Beaumont] was in charge of them, if such it can be called, and seemed, although a trifle weary, to be rising above it with commendable fortitude.

In the evening Tony, Miller and I dined early and went to the show. In the middle of it Leslie Henson made an impromptu speech recounting some of the company's experiences in the Near East and eulogising the gallant little ladies of the company for the magnificent way they had faced the unendurable hardships of travelling in service aircraft through the heat of the desert. This was,

I fear, inaccurate, as the gallant little ladies had told me that morning with the utmost sincerity that they had never enjoyed themselves so much in their lives. The men received this heartrending account of their Odyssey with remarkable composure. Beatrice Lillie gave the most spectacularly brilliant performance I have ever seen her give. She never condescended or overplayed, she looked enchanting and sang with attack, ineffable humour and charm. It seemed to me that her always assured technique had gained a little extra magic; she played to those men with good will and a shining heart and, I need hardly add, absolutely tore the place up.

July —

To-day I drove into Spain with H.E. and lunched out of doors at a little inn called Miraflores with a lot of wealthy Spanish ladies who were very chirrupy and gay. The conversation alternated between Spanish and French despite the fact that they could all speak English perfectly. However this all added a touch of cosmopolitan charm to the scene.

In the late afternoon I came back to Gib. and went over the military hospital. It seemed to me to be very well run, the matron was nice and all the patients looked cheerful and excellently cared for. Most of them were casualties caused by bits of Gibraltar falling on them. There is still so much blasting and burrowing going on that this is not surprising. I have an uneasy suspicion

that when the ultimate victory salute is fired the whole rock will fall in like a soufflé.

After tea with the hospital staff I came back to G.H. and went out with John to see the ceremony of the 'Keys' and very impressive it was too. The Somersets did the whole thing in double time and it was a lovely sight, another manifestation of the English State Ballet.

After this we hurried back, changed, swallowed a drink and a sandwich and went hurtling up the Rock to see the Garrison Theatre company perform in a very confined space with considerable efficiency. The show was fast moving and well done; three E.N.S.A. girls and the rest local Army talent. After the show we had sandwiches and beer in the sergeants' mess. Here further entertainment also ensued. It was all quite fun but went on too long. H.E. made a brief and graceful speech after which we came home, and, at long last, had supper and went to bed.

July —

There has been an influx of transient visitors to-day, among them the Turkish Ambassador and Tommy (Boy) Browning (Daphne du Maurier's husband). I hadn't seen him since the time of the treaty negotiations in Egypt. I like him a great deal. We had a long talk in course of which he told me a lot about airborne fighting and its importance, not only during the war, but as an effective policing method for afterwards. He described some hair-raising glider experiments. He is obviously in-

capable of fear and there is an impressive fanaticism about him. I told him that I had seen Daphne and Muriel [Lady du Maurier] a few weeks ago in Plymouth when they had come over from Fowey to see 'Present Laughter.' He is leaving to-night on his own plane with a cargo of lemons and bananas for them.

July —

This morning my ship came back into the harbour having been at sea for a few days. I say 'my ship' firmly, after that voyage out from England. I went on board in the forenoon and it was like coming home.

Lunched at the Mount with Admiral Collins. Annersley was there, whom I haven't seen since Malta, also Moody, now an Admiral, who was Commander of 'Resolution' when I joined her during the Greek earthquake in 1932. He is now flying his flag in one of the larger ships in the harbour.

H.E. has had a signal from Lord Gort saying that he is expecting me in Malta as soon as possible so I shall be leaving in a day or two.

July —

To-day H.E. took me over the Rock and through countless tunnels and it is one of the most remarkable achievements I have ever seen. In the heart of it there is enough food, water, ammunition, etc., to keep the

whole garrison for a considerable time. There is also more machinery of all sorts than one would ever believe possible. There are fully equipped hospitals, secret operations rooms, store rooms, rest rooms, canteens, bakeries, etc., etc., and the whole place bristles with guns and every implement of modern warfare. When I remember being here three years ago when there was virtually nothing and realise what has been done since then it really is staggering.

Without the Rock being impregnable I should imagine that we could never have been able to make the African landings, nor, indirectly, could we be now delivering these smashing assaults on Sicily and Italy. As a thoroughly biased, ignorant and enthusiastic layman I should say that it was one of the greatest individual executive achievements of the war. It is also very heartening to reflect that all those hundreds of thousands of tons of machinery and stores were brought out by convoy during our darkest days when the U-boat menace was at its worst. Britannia still rules the waves all right.

August —

I'm leaving here on Tuesday with H.E. in his own plane for Oran and Algiers. I shall stay in Algiers for a few days and then go direct to Malta.

I took Beattie, Dottie and Vivien on board my ship to lunch. When finally we went away in the Captain's boat most of the ship's company had collected to wave good-bye. I felt suddenly desolate. They are sailing this

afternoon. It's bad enough leaving a ship in which you have been happy in peace-time, but in war the heart sinks still lower.

We all went swimming in the afternoon at Rose Bay; the water was clear although chilly. Afterwards when Vivien and I were having tea in the Rock Hotel an elderly Colonel came up and told us that he had just heard on the news that Owen Nares had died suddenly of heart failure. This was a shock. I've known Owen all my life in the theatre. I met him first at a sanatorium in the Cotswolds when I was twelve. I'm so dreadfully sorry for poor Marie [Mrs. Owen Nares]. It is cruel fortune to lose a son and a husband within a year.

I walked down to Government House in time to change for dinner. Gibraltar is an extraordinary place. I have always had an affection for it, not only because of the happy times I have had there with the Navy in the past, but because of its own very definite personality. There is charm in its narrow streets, and some of the old houses are lovely. Above all of course there are the most superb views. To sit high on the Rock at sunset and look across the bay to Algeciras and the purple mountains behind, or across the Narrows to the coast of Africa; to watch little ships, minute as toys from that height, making pencil marks across the darkening sea; and to hear the distant bugles blowing and see the lights come up in the town; all this has enchanted me ever since the first time I ever landed there. Now of course a change has taken place. It is more grim and efficient and there is a busy aerodrome where the race course used to be.

There are new sounds too, clangings and blastings and deep muffled explosions. There are also many thousands of men penned up here from one year's end to another with nothing to do and nowhere to go when the day's work is done. I don't expect that these are very appreciative of the atmospheric charms of the place. But for me, a visitor passing through, the charms still exist; the sun still rises and sets and paints the whole scene in fantastic colours; the lights still come up in the town; and the bugles still blow in the distance.

The day finished with a ball at Government House. The gallant little ladies came and the gallant little gentlemen too and we all sang songs and danced. Leslie, with tireless vivacity, organised some of us into a performance. H.E. made a speech and thanked us, curfew time came, everyone said good night and went home to bed, and that was that.

August 2nd

We took off at twelve forty-five in a Hudson. It was H.E.'s private plane and, although fiercely equipped with armaments, roomy and comfortable. The party consisted of H.E.; the pilot, who had a long face and a sense of humour; Colonel Clinch, extremely nice; and a Captain Glover who had a hearty manner and called me 'Nole.' We had a picnic lunch of sandwiches, fruit and wine in the middle of all the guns and bombs and arrived at Oran at about three o'clock. We drove through the town and out to a battle school by the sea which H.E.

was going to inspect. Here at last the real heat that I had been pining for for so long began to seep into my bones. Freezing memories of Hull in November, Inverness in January and even London in June melted finally away under the burning sun and I relaxed to it gratefully.

The town of Oran was shimmering in the afternoon glare and as we drove through the hot streets I recognised with a pang many familiar, alien sights and sounds that I had been missing sorely during these last difficult years. There it was again, the good old French North African atmosphere, laid on thick; Arabs scurrying about in tarbooshes; camels wandering along the side of the road in the sparse shade of the dusty trees; faded, striped sunblinds shading the windows of ornate French villas; an occasional mosque gallantly holding on to its dignity; a waiter doing his accounts under the awning of a deserted café that might have been transplanted lock, stock and barrel from the Boulevard Raspail; French names over all the shops and, in the centre of the town of course, that inevitable, imperishable monument to French provincialism, a municipal opera house. This one looked a bit decayed, its façade was battered, either by bombardment or climate, and a lot of its plaster work was cracking, but there was still a weary old playbill of 'La Bohème' pasted on to one of its columns. There was a new note however in this dusty old French colonial symphony, and a pretty sharp note at that. This was struck by the American occupation. There were evidences of it on all sides. Over a 'Café—Tabac' was a sign with 'Doughnuts' printed on it; there were khaki-clad figures everywhere. Also, outside

a canteen there was a billboard with 'To-Nite! Bing Crosby and Dorothy Lamour.' I really felt quite sorry for the poor old municipal opera house.

When we reached the battle school which was some miles on the other side of the town I borrowed a pair of trunks and went to have a swim. The water was gloriously warm and I floated about and, battle school or no battle school, the war seemed to be a long way away. However the fact that it wasn't was borne home to me almost immediately by a series of violent explosions and clouds of dust arising from the surrounding countryside. I looked up anxiously into the empty sky to see if there were any enemy dive bombers and then realised that the bangs were undoubtedly the high spots of H.E.'s inspection.

After a few drinks in the mess with the tough but amiable battle school warriors several of us piled into a truck, driven perilously by H.E., and went churning along the beach to a little farm-cum-restaurant right on the edge of the sea. Here we were received effusively by the patron and his wife and given a most delicious pre-war French dinner cooked with great ceremony and a lot of garlic. There was potage, langouste with a wonderful mayonnaise and sauce Anglaise, poulet, haricots verts, a salad which brought wistful tears to the eyes, and a great deal of vin rosée. We dined under a trellis hung with enormous bunches of grapes and in the middle of the meal the harsh electric lights fused so we finished the evening with candles in glass protectors. It was a clear night and the sky was full of stars. We did a little com-

munal singing, old French songs and some modern ones too; 'Auprès de ma blonde'—'Clair de lune'—'Frère Jacques' and 'J'en ai marié' and 'Valentine.' Presently the moon came up and added the final touch of enchantment. H.E. drove us into a mild quicksand on the way home but we all got out and pushed, ankle deep in sand and seaweed, and arrived back in Oran at about 1:00 A.M.—happy, replete and very sleepy.

August 3rd

This, in days gone by, used to be one of the best hotels in the town. It has now been requisitioned by the U.S. Army and so there is again that marked clash of atmospheres. It is most excellently run but there are few concessions to luxury.

I lay in a vast bed in a vast room under an unshaded electric light bulb and the faded but still flamboyant wallpaper frowned down on me as though I had no right to be there at all. The bathroom was also enormous and the bidet looked self-conscious. In the morning I was inadvertently called at seven o'clock and, having ascertained that no coffee or tea could be served in the rooms, I shaved and dressed and came downstairs to a real, died-in-the-wool American breakfast. Orange juice, cereals, griddle-cakes, bacon, maple syrup and coffee. Outside the windows, in the main square, colonial France was gently decaying. Inside was Cincinnati rampant. The contrast was as enjoyable as the breakfast.

We took off from the airfield at ten o'clock and flew to

Algiers. I sat up in front with the pilot most of the time and watched the dramatic coastline slipping away beneath us. The colour was sharp and clear, deep blue sea turning to jade green in the shallows, and almost orange cliffs and mountains. We dropped down at Maison Blanche at eleven forty-five. Here I said good-bye to Mason-Mac, who was going off for a series of conferences with the big shots. It had been arranged for me to stay at A.F.H.Q. which, when translated, means Allied Forces Headquarters. (I shall try to translate initials whenever possible in this diary because if I don't I shall become too confused ever to understand it.) I was met by a Captain Deely, who, although shy at first, relaxed after a little while. He pointed out various things of interest on the way into Algiers; masses of coloured American troops engaged in erecting temporary huts and sheds, etc., several shell holes and craters, the result of the bombardment of the town; an ammunition ship in the harbour which had been blown up a few weeks ago and was still smouldering.

A.F.H.Q. is installed in a luxurious villa furnished with a number of mirrors and angular chairs and tables and a rather hysterical colour scheme. On arrival I was shown into what had once been the daintiest of bedrooms; however the manly ways of the British Army had changed all that. In bleak contrast to the glories of downstairs there were no mirrors at all, not even a shaving glass, but there was a camp bed, mosquito net, bed table and chair and a very good line in enamel basin ware. All this was perfectly adequate to anybody's needs, but up

against the green jealousies and the ultra-feminine shrimp-pink wallpaper its austerity was downright frightening.

I went down to lunch in the mess, which has an air of cheerful informality about it. There are five resident American officers and five English, and if only the larger issues of Anglo-American relationships could be run as easily and amiably, the future would offer few problems. After lunch, to my joy and surprise, Joe Vian rang up and rated me soundly for staying with the Army and not the Navy. I mollified him by explaining that (a) I didn't know he was there, and (b) That the General had very kindly invited me, which was more than he had done. I added that if he played his cards right and behaved really well I *might* be able to use my influence to get him invited to dinner. After this arch exchange of badinage the conversation closed.

Later in the day I was taken to bathe by Jack Remnant, the General's P.A. A Colonel Phillips and a Colonel Baumer came too; Colonel Baumer turned out to be Lewis Baumer's son. The bathe was rather a failure on account of the fact that there was an unpleasant hot wind that blew the sand into our eyes, the water was thick and turgid and the sun retired behind an immense cloud the moment we arrived.

Dinner in the mess was most convivial. Joe came and Douglas Fairbanks telephoned at about ten o'clock and was immediately invited up to have a drink. He arrived looking much the same as usual but, I thought, a little tired. He is doing a naval staff job of some sort. The evening became even gayer, songs were sung and stories

told and when finally I retired to my shrimp boudoir it was one in the morning.

August 4th

Spent the first part of the morning practising at a curly rosewood grand piano in the 'salon' and then went down to call on Harold Macmillan, whose villa is just at the bottom of the garden. H.E. appeared for a minute or two. Harold talked for a little about the complications and difficulties of the French situation. His comments struck me as being wise and shrewd. I can't feel that his job is an entirely enviable one but I am convinced that he is handling it with the utmost tact. I suppose in the far distant future all the prejudices and envies and political twistings and turnings will be straightened out but that day seems to me to be the hell of a way off.

Joe's car picked me up at one o'clock and I picked him up at the 'school' where he is busy planning the 'next step,' whatever that may be. I think I can guess. We then drove to a camp high up in the pine woods where we lunched with some Army officers. The camp was originally General Alexander's headquarters and I must say he chose a sympathetic spot for it; it consisted of a number of tents pitched at different levels with flat cement terraces laid out in front of them commanding a perfect view of the sea between the trees. After lunch we drove out to a beach and bathed. 'We' consisted of Joe, Wells, his Flag Lieutenant (known as 'The Duck' in the good old 'Arethusa' days) and a Colonel Huxley. Huxley was

interesting about General Montgomery, with whom he served all through the desert campaign. He was the first man I have met who has actually worked with him and fought with him and he gave a vivid and glowing account of what is obviously the most complex and extraordinary personality the war has produced. As a matter of fact I don't suppose the war did produce it really, merely enhanced it. Characters of that calibre don't develop suddenly in the course of a few months.

The principal thing that stood out a mile in his description was 'Monty's' hold on the minds and imaginations of his men. He must possess to a marked degree what is described in the theatre as 'star quality,' nor is the theatre apparently so very far away from him. This essential 'theatrical' flair is, I am sure, what so frequently infuriates his less volatile peers, but oh, how rare and important it is in a leader of men, providing always that it is not carried too far. Whether or not 'Monty' carries it too far I don't know, never having clapped eyes on him. I have however seen him on the newsreels and noted immediately three great attributes: complete authority, a direct eye, and a compelling economy of gesture. He didn't strike me as being particularly histrionic but if he had happened to have been playing a scene I should have said that he was a true actor rather than a false one. I have a letter to him from Brendan [Brendan Bracken] and I very much hope that I shall have an opportunity of delivering it. A man with that amount of personal magnetism plus ascetic toughness and military genius must, theatrical or not, be well worth meeting.

We got back to Algiers in time for me to change before giving a three-quarters-of-an-hour concert to about five hundred men, the personnel and riders of the General's staff. This, in spite of being in the open air, went very well. After a couple of drinks with the officers I rushed back to the house and changed again, being very hot indeed, and got to Harold's villa in time for the tail end of a large civilian cocktail party. There was a Marine band playing under the trees on the lawn and a high-pitched buzz of cosmopolitan conversation. There was surprisingly little tension in the air considering that all the Giraudists and De Gaullists were swirling about together.

The day ended with dinner on board Joe's ship in the harbour. Gammon [Able Seaman Gammon] waited on us and it felt quite like old times.

August 5th

To-day began well with the news that Catania had at last fallen. This, although involving bad casualties, I'm afraid, must surely mean that we shall soon have the whole of Sicily.

At ten o'clock I went to call on General Eisenhower armed with a letter of introduction from Dickie [Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten, G.C.V.O., C.B., D.S.O., A.D.C.]. I waited a bit in a light, sunny ante-room and talked to a nice P.A. (Personal Assistant). His name was Lee and we chatted, sentimentally, of New York. I signed several autographs for members of the staff and

the whole atmosphere was relaxed and utterly lacking in pomposity. Eventually I was shown in to the inner office where General Eisenhower was seated at his desk. I delivered my letter of introduction and he read it through quickly and offered me a cigarette. He has a tough manner and a warm, Middle Western voice and he eyed me, at first, with slight suspicion. I am sure that 'Actor—probably effeminate—and certainly artificial' was passing through his mind. There was a reason for this wariness which, after a little while, he explained. Apparently a member of my profession, who shall be nameless, had, only a very little while ago, made the grave psychological mistake of overflattering him! He was exceedingly funny about this and said that it had not only bored the hell out of him but embarrassed him so much that he had been unable to think of a word to say. It appears that he had been asked, in so many words, how it felt to be such a great man. Personally I should have thought that a half-witted adolescent of fifteen would have had more sense than to have tried that sort of stuff on Eisenhower. Not, I should think, that he was entirely immune to flattery, nobody is, but one look at him should have been enough to show that that sort of false naïveté was doomed to abysmal failure. When he had finished telling me about it I immediately asked him how it felt to be such a great man and he laughed and thawed completely.

After I had told him where I was going and what I proposed to do and asked him for a few facilities here and there, I got up to go, but he made me sit down again, offered me another cigarette and proceeded to

talk more horse sense about Anglo-American relationships than I have heard for a long time. He minds really deeply about this and, as everybody knows, his handling of the situation between the two armies, from the African landings onwards, has been both wise and determined. He seemed to me to have most of the points of this vexed, and at moments very vexing, question at his finger-tips. He spoke of us as a nation, without effusiveness but with respect and admiration. He spoke of his own country with deep sincerity and without a touch of facile patriotism. While he was talking I couldn't help comparing in my mind this conversation with a most unpleasant interview I had with ex-President Hoover at Palo Alto in the autumn of 1940. At that moment, when our island was standing alone and was being bombed incessantly every night of the week, Hoover spoke slightly and contemptuously of us. I think his view may have been jaundiced by the fact that he had been prevented from launching a vast campaign for sending food to starving France which, obviously, would at once have been appropriated by the Germans. I remembered watching his eyes, and wondering what his motives really were and if in fact he himself actually knew what they were. Did he in fact give a damn for the starving people of France (who at that time weren't starving at all) or was he merely yearning for a personal come-back? I couldn't make up my mind what, if any, truth lay in his heart. Whatever it was it could only have been a sentimental truth for his ideas were unsound, impolitic and impracticable. Here I was, three years later, talking to another

American and, it seemed to me, a man of great American quality, a man who most deliberately shuns publicity unless he considers it to be of use to his cause, above all a military man with a clear sense of human values. I have no knowledge of how right or how wrong his policy was in dealing with the problems of Darlan and the French situation but even if he was wrong and overexpedient, which his critics have suggested, I don't see how an honest Middle Westerner could be expected to negotiate the dangerous corners, dark tunnels and hairpin bends of French politics at that time.

What he does know however is the immense, vital importance of Anglo-American co-operation, not only during the war but for all future years. He combats untiringly the little cracks and lampoons and jokes spread by the British against the Americans or vice versa. I believe he even sacked an important member of his staff for making a minor contribution to this dangerous, subversive racket. For racket it is. Not a money racket but a racket for getting easy laughs, and there is nothing more gratifying to the irresponsible human ego than getting an easy laugh. One silly man with one laborious little joke can cause an incredible amount of damage. It is a frightening thought that careless talk, enough careless talk, can cost more than lives. It might cost the future of Western civilisation. I devoutly hope that after the war Eisenhower's voice will be heard in the United States. He has been at close grips with the realities of the situation and he knows what is true.

Went on board the 'Howe' to call on Captain Wood-

house and fortunately remembered to take my battered hat with me as I was saluted right and left. Woodhouse, after we had had a chat in his cabin, took me into the wardroom, which seemed huge and imposing after the intimacy of smaller ships. Everybody was welcoming as usual and I wished that I could have stayed longer but I had to leave to go and lunch with Harold. This turned out to be most entertaining. The atmosphere was distinctly De Gaullist and among those present were Eric Duncannon, Roger Makin, Gaston Palevski and André Gide. Gaston is personal assistant to De Gaulle and we were friends in Paris in the early months of the war when he was Reynaud's Chef du Cabinet. I was very interested to meet André Gide and also surprised. He was quite unlike I thought he would be. I think perhaps that the war years have depressed him and sapped his vitality for he seemed tired and a trifle dim. He was also swathed in a mantle of French professorial eminence. I have known this happen to other French writers. It has something to do with prestige and acclaim and the Académie Française. Perhaps in France writers are revered too much. Possibly our English method of treating them with suspicion tinged with disdain is healthier in the long run. At all events although he was most charming and polite he gave me the impression that he was regarding us, world chaos and the excellent lunch from the top of a mountain. Harold handled the whole lunch party with tact and wit. I am always lost in admiration of Englishmen who can be really witty in French.

After lunch Harold showed me, with a twinkle in his

eye, a virulent attack on me in the 'Daily Herald' by, of all people, Spike Hughes. I was really quite startled. I first met Spike years ago when he was working on some of the orchestrations for 'Words and Music.' He also helped me through most generously when my musical director fell ill and we had to conduct the whole score through together for several performances. I had always rather liked him and considered that he had a certain amount of creative musical talent. It was a shock to see how much venom he had accumulated over the years and also that he had forsaken music for journalism. The object of his tirade was the broadcast I did in London the night before I sailed in which I sang 'Don't Let's Be Beastly to the Germans' and recited my R.A.F. verse, 'Lie in the Dark and Listen.' His attack was overpersonal and far, far too long. Vituperation is an ineffective weapon unless it is handled with consummate skill. If I have time when I return I shall get hold of him and we will re-do it together in a more adroit and concentrated form and he can reprint it with much more deadly effect.

In the afternoon, accompanied by the faithful Captain Deely, I visited one of the larger military hospitals. This was not an unqualified success. The matron was charming but the commanding officer received me with bored casualness, as though I had just come in to get out of the rain. After I had been through two wards he said, stifling a yawn, that we had better go and have tea. I explained, perhaps rather tartly, that I had not come to tea but to see the patients, and so on we went and I am delighted to say I ran him off his feet. The men of course were fine.

I shook hands with and talked to about five hundred of them. I think they were pleased to see me; anyway I was more than pleased to see them. It is a moving and inspiring lesson to see the courage with which our countrymen face the suffering and indignities of being bed-ridden. I was profoundly glad that I went. At the end of it I asked if I could wash before tea as I was hot and sticky having shaken hands with all sorts and kinds of malaria cases, paratyphoids, dysenteries, diphtherias, etc., whereupon I was shown into an outside lavatory where there was only cold water, a dank and filthy roller towel that had obviously been used by hundreds of people, and no soap at all. After this I was led to the sisters' tent. The matron happened to be out and no one introduced me to anyone or made the slightest effort at conversation. Perhaps they were shy, which is the usual excuse for English bad manners. At all events I stood about for a bit in the middle of the tent with everybody staring at me and, after signing one of the more courageous nurses' cuffs, I came away. I was told afterwards that poor Deely had been taken aside and told discreetly that he couldn't be asked to take tea in the sisters' tent as no one below the rank of colonel was allowed in!

I dined with a very charming French couple called Kaplon. Apart from Madame Kaplon there was only one other woman present, Madame Baul. The rest were all officers of various ranks and nationalities. The whole party was unmistakably Giraudist in sympathy. To my surprise André Maurois was there. It appears that he has, at last, climbed off his American fence to lend his powers

to the cause. The conversation was almost entirely in French and at dinner I sat next to the only American present, Dan Gilmor, who didn't understand a word and was exceedingly funny about it. After dinner I obliged with a few songs in both languages and everyone became sentimental about 'La France' and 'Paris' except Dan Gilmor, who became lightly sozzled. It was an amusing evening but when I came away I felt ill at ease, a little unsure whether or not they really minded about 'La France' as much as they said they did.

August —

Sailed at noon in a small destroyer. We are taking a large convoy so we probably shan't reach Malta until late Sunday night or early Monday morning. The Captain (a Lieutenant Commander) is friendly, large, sun-burned and happily nonchalant. I am sharing his day cabin with a pleasant but rather withdrawn Commander who is also a passenger. We had an argument as to which of us should have the settee and which the camp bed. He finally insisted on the camp bed. As we wear only shorts and put on shirts for dinner in the wardroom as a gesture of decorum, the difficulties of dressing are minimised.

It is extraordinary to think that this time a year ago this was the most dangerous route of all. It is hard to imagine, steaming along on this calm, gentle sea under a cloudless sky, what hell it must have been. The convoy ships looked most complacent and unflurried as though

dive bombers and submarines and torpedoes had never been invented and the Mediterranean had always been at peace. The weather is perfect and the North African coast on our starboard side is different shades of mauve and blue.

There is a rating on the bridge who is really magnificent. He is about six foot, youngish and dressed in an abbreviated pair of faded blue shorts with a knife slung round his waist and a white cap which he wears as a sort of turban. He has an enormous beard, gleaming white teeth and a body that would make Gary Cooper envious. Real old-school pirate stuff. How Winnie would love to paint him.

I've written two verses and one extra refrain for 'That Is the End of the News' so that is now finished. It is a vulgar little song but I think it's funny all right. I must rehearse it very carefully before I sing it as the lyric is complicated.

It's lovely being at sea again.

August —

I spent most of the morning fitting two of Winnie's 'Englishry' poems into one, which necessitated cutting a great deal and reorganising some of the scansion and rhyming. I think I've made an effective piece out of it. What Winnie will think is quite another matter.

At about four o'clock the Captain came down to shave and have a cup of tea. He was in the middle of apologising for the uneventfulness and dullness of the trip when

the buzzer rang. I said gaily, 'Enemy submarine.' He lifted up the receiver and said, 'Christ!—Torpedo!' and rushed up on to the bridge. I went out on to the fo'c'sle and saw, only a little way off, one large old ship sinking. It was all over in three minutes and one of the saddest sights I have ever seen. She seemed to be kneeling apologetically in the calm sea; she lingered for a few moments and then, with desolate resignation, disappeared utterly. The whole thing was so horribly gentle and unspectacular, and oddly silent, like a film without the sound track. There were a few bits of wreckage and a few heads bobbing about in the water but that was all.

The convoy steamed on as though nothing had happened; a couple of escort vessels stood off to pick up survivors; the rest began dropping depth charges; we did too. The dazzling white columns of spray looked beautiful and unreal and then, suddenly, a sharp cold fear attacked me. It wasn't—thank God—a panicky fear, but the grim, logical realisation that an enemy submarine was just below the surface, possibly quite near us and might, at any second, appear and fire a torpedo into us. I watched myself carefully and was much impressed by my stately calm. I returned to the cabin, put on my Gieves waistcoat and most meticulously filled my cigarette case, reflecting that a cigarette on the bridge is at least an aid to outward nonchalance. There was tension on the bridge and a great deal of staccato conversation; signals were flashed back and forth between the escort vessels; more depth charges were dropped and presently our sister ship signalled that she had firm contact which

meant that there was a fifty-fifty chance that the depth charges had disabled the submarine. A couple of hours later we saw an immense column of smoke on the horizon. I hope and pray and believe that it was that bloody submarine being blown to hell.

August —

An uneventful day distinguished only by one of the most peculiar performances I have ever given in my life. It took place on the mess deck where the majority of the ship's company were assembled. It was hotter than the hottest room in a Turkish bath, there was no piano at all and quite a sea running so I was unable to keep my balance without hanging on to various cross bars and pipes like a chimpanzee. In addition to this the men were all round me so I had to gyrate slowly throughout every song. However I managed to keep going for about forty minutes and they laughed and cheered and although they and I were wringing wet it was a riotous success.

After this effort I was led to a shower and given some gin and then went on to the bridge in time to see a tricky little marine operation. We had to close in with another destroyer, shoot a line across to her, and pass over the orders for the night. All this would have been routine stuff except for the fact that there was a heavy following sea and both ships were rolling and wallowing alarmingly. Also, for some unexplained reason, we elected to do the whole operation broadside on to the approaching convoy. I watched apprehensively this large convoy of

ships of all shapes and sizes steadily bearing down on us but fortunately the entire business was executed with such efficiency and dispatch that we were able to cast off and shoot away in opposite directions in the nick of time. A somewhat acid signal was received from the Commodore commanding but this was greeted with gay, triumphant laughter. The rest of the evening was spent in sending appropriate biblical signals to the other escort ships. The Captain frenziedly thumbed the Bible until he found some phrase such as 'Put your trust in me and be not afraid,' then the yeoman would flash, 'John, 13th chapter, 4th verse,' or whatever it was and we waited, happily picturing the feverish biblical activity on the recipient's bridge until the reply came back. This went on for quite a while and was a good game enjoyed by all, particularly the yeoman of signals. He was a tough, wiry little man with, strange to say, a strong predilection for the ballet which, perish the thought, he had apparently once adorned in a minor capacity. I say 'perish the thought' because the vision of a yeoman of signals winsomely pirouetting through 'Les Sylphides' is almost more than I can bear.

Enemy aircraft reported but nobody paid any attention. Bed.

August —

Wakened at six and looked out of the scuttle to see Malta, like a complicated child's sand castle, glowing in the sunshine. After shaving, dressing and packing, a nice-

looking Army Captain called Jim Holland came on board to fetch me off. The ship's motor boat decided to conk out so, when I had made my tender and regretful good-byes, we went ashore in a Dhaisier. As I stepped on to this historic island a loud speaker, just above the Customs House, announced in ringing tones that we were about to hear those famous English artists Hermione Gingold and Walter Crisham! The magnificent incongruity of this fascinated me; unfortunately however there was no time to stop and hear them and we got into the car and drove off. The whole place certainly looked pretty battered but not as devastated as I had expected, but we didn't drive through the worst parts. Government House (the Palace) is a fifteenth-century castle perched on the top of a hill miles away from everywhere. It is one of the few places on the island that can boast a few trees. We arrived at seven-thirty and Lord Gort received me most kindly and we had breakfast. After this we listened to the morning news and then marched, quite fast, up and down a cement tennis-court for about twenty minutes. I had a sinister suspicion that the object of this was to keep fit so I tactfully evaded it for the rest of my stay.

At nine o'clock the Brigadier appeared. He is to be in charge of my itinerary. We discussed times and means, etc. I am to do two hospitals a day, a forty-minute concert in each for the up patients and then a tour of the wards. There are also to be a few rest camps thrown in. We drove down into Valletta to try the piano which is to be conveyed round the island with me on a truck. Happily it is a good one although I doubt if it will be as good

by the time I leave. I also tried out a dark little Maltese accompanist who attacked my waltz medley with all the delicate sensitivity of a lumber-jack faced with a particularly recalcitrant tree trunk. . . . I let him bash away for a bit and then politely got rid of him, feeling that, on the whole, it would be preferable to die by my own hand. I had a brief half an hour's practice and then gave a press interview and was photographed ad nauseam against some bits of bomb damage.

I got back to G.H. just before lunch and found to my delight Bertie Packer [Captain H. A. Packer, R.N.] and Admiral Bisset. Bertie, who was Captain of Whale Island, is now commanding 'Warspite.' With them was Captain Ashmore, who had distinguished himself during the making of 'In Which We Serve' by seeing a few shots of it and announcing that it was very bad propaganda for the Navy and that he would hate his wife and children to see it. I do hope they've seen it by now.

At three o'clock I went off to give my first concert at a rest camp. It was agony to start with because I was nervous but it went down all right. After this, wet through, I was given tea and a quarter of an hour's bathe. The water was warm and crystal clear. The bathing at Malta has always been the best in the world. I remembered so many happy days in the past with Dickie and Edwina [Lady Louis Mountbatten] and the 'Lizard,' their swift green motor launch. Picnics on the rocks at Gozo; painful but enjoyable hours trying to master water-skiing, with Dickie always doing it much better than anybody else.

At five-thirty I did another concert, this time at a large hospital. I was more at ease and it was much better than the first one. I toured the wards and talked to all the bed patients, many of whom had just arrived from Sicily. Apart from the battle casualties there were an enormous number of malaria cases; apparently it is a great deal more prevalent there than anyone suspected. I was newsreeled and photographed incessantly. I tried to stop them taking photographs of me in the wards because I felt that it would look cheap, as though I were trying to cash in on a little publicity at the expense of the wounded men. However the matron explained to me that the men liked the photography because they could get copies and send them home to their wives, so I let it go.

August —

Called at seven o'clock, breakfast at seven forty-five. I escaped the matutinal tennis-court parade and retired to my room in order to gather myself together for the ardours of the day.

Did my first concert at the Milheia hospital at ten o'clock. Not the best moment of the day for the voice but they didn't seem to mind. While I was doing the wards afterwards Bill Fairchild suddenly appeared. He is now in the 'Nelson.' So many of my naval friends are here and it's maddening that I shall have no time to go and visit them but there it is. The hospital was impressive and obviously well run. There were some horrors of

course. One poor man with some sort of rheumatic paralysis had been in an iron lung for eight months. He was wonderfully cheerful and he had a photograph of his wife stuck on to the ceiling so that he could smile up at her quite easily. The Sicily cases were also cheerful; some of them were awfully badly shot up. One boy had just had his leg amputated and although he made a fierce effort to behave ordinarily he couldn't quite disguise the misery in his eyes. He was young and good-looking and it was pretty heartbreaking. He will be happier and more resigned in a few days, I expect; our natural resilience as a race is remarkable.

Touring round these hospitals is certainly a salutary experience and I am profoundly grateful to have had the opportunity of doing it. No imagination however vivid could quite visualise the quality of these men. It isn't only their bravery in action and, God knows, that's considerable enough; it's their magnificent capacity for overcoming, or at least appearing to overcome, the desolation, boredom, homesickness, pain and discomfort of lying day after day, week after week, and sometimes month after month with nothing to do but swat flies if they happen to have an uninjured hand to do it with. Most of them have snap-shots of their mothers or wives or girl friends or children always close at hand so that they can look at them whenever they can bear to. Many of them haven't been home for two or three years. Some of them will never go home again. It is only after I have left the hospitals that any sadnesses come into my mind. While I am there their own superb manners make any

display of sympathy impossible. I can only hope that by just chatting with them for a few minutes I can at least temporarily mitigate their boredom and give them something to write home about, though why a man who has been through hell and carnage and been maimed for life should derive any comfort from a few words with a healthy and successful playwright is beyond me.

I had a quiet lunch with H.E. and staff and then started off again. On the way I made a brief call on old Mrs. Lawson, who was delighted and sent rapturous messages to Edwina and Dickie and Marjorie [The Countess of Brecknock], etc. She is a dear old girl and has stayed put all through the bombing and the siege. From her I went on to an even larger hospital than this morning's and repeated my same procedure. This time a young officer called Fred Rimmer accompanied me in the 'medley.' He really did very well but, naturally enough, I missed Robb [Robb Stewart].

The tour of the wards was much the same as this morning. There were a lot of blood transfusions going on. One man was bright green at the thought of having it done so I popped round to the other side of the bed and engaged him in conversation until the incision was made and the contrivance working properly.

One chipper little man who had been shot full of shrapnel and machine-gun bullets was very chatty. I asked him what he thought of Sicily and he said, 'The Germans were all right and the Eyties were all right but the mosquitoes were bloody awful!'

After all this the kind Brigadier drove me down to

the shore where I had a swim. One of the more tiresome aspects of the burn cases is the smell, and a plunge in the sea got it out of my nostrils.

Had a drink with the Brigadier, called on Ella and Kay Warren, and then went home to dinner which was restful and unspectacular. Just a couple of Generals and a rather drawn-out discussion of the Windsors.

Bed early.

August —

A heavy but successful day. Two rest camp concerts in the morning. After lunch I had a rest and a swim, changed and went to the Command Fair for my big concert. Lord Gort came and it was a terrific success although so dreadfully hot that I was soaked to the skin after my first number; however I persevered for fifty-five minutes with the sweat running into my eyes and down my fingers on to the piano keys. At the end Lord Gort made a most charming speech about how grateful all ranks were to me, etc., everybody cheered and I was extremely touched.

From there, after a quick drink, I drove to the Manoel Theatre where they were giving a special performance of 'In Which We Serve' and where I was billed to make a personal appearance. The theatre and street was jammed with people and apparently hundreds had had to be turned away. The theatre owner, Godfrey Caruana, received me with a committee and presented me with a book, 'The Epic of Malta,' with a flattering

inscription in it. The Manoel is a lovely old theatre; I believe it is the oldest in Europe. It is curly and rococo with many tiers and a number of boxes. It reeked with atmosphere and sense of the past and I could imagine how it must have looked on some gala evening in the seventies or eighties, with bejewelled Maltese ladies fanning themselves in the boxes and listening rapturously to 'Rigoletto' or 'Traviata.' On this particular occasion there were unbejewelled British sailors fanning themselves in the boxes; troops of all ranks and services were all over the house. I made a brief speech about Malta and its world-renowned gallantry during the bombardment and the siege. I then talked for a little about our British naval traditions in Malta and tore off 'Trafalgar Day' for them. They listened to this almost as rapturously as the Maltese ladies had listened to 'Traviata.' Finally I drove away through the streets with the crowds yelling their heads off.

The A.O.C. Air Marshal Sir Keith Park came to dinner. He had a smooth voice and great charm of manner and, more charming still, offered to fly me to Sicily to-morrow. We persuaded Lord Gort to give me permission to go and so I cancelled my to-morrow's flight to Cairo until Saturday and retired to bed in a state of high excitement.

August 12th

The 'Glorious Twelfth' and here I am about to go and watch some of the shooting!

There is a gentle austerity about breakfast in Government House. There is a copy of the 'Malta Times' for each of us but Lord Gort, rightly, is the only one who has a sort of lectern upon which to prop it. Conversation is sporadic and consists mostly of a brisk interchange of questions and answers. On the dot of eight-fifteen we adjourn to the large salon to listen to the news which comes to us very, very faintly by courtesy of the B.B.C. Regularly as clockwork at eight twenty-five Lord Gort says, 'Padding—turn it off,' and marches out for his morning drill on the tennis-court. This morning I was upstairs in my room preparing for my assault upon Sicily when Randolph Churchill suddenly appeared. He looked sunburnt and well and we gossiped for about half an hour. He wants me to go and entertain his troops in Phillipville on my way back through Tunis.

At nine-thirty I was fetched by Hugo Carver and driven to the A.O.C.'s headquarters. Here I found Billy Drake, as nonchalant and butter-coloured as ever. He has just got another bar to his D.S.C. and is in command of a fighter wing. Billy Drake is in the early twenties and is one of our aces. I met him first in the Crillon bar in Paris in January 1940. He and a few of his pals from A.A.S.F. (Advanced Air Striking Force) had forty-eight hours' leave and asked me to sign a menu for them. When I had done this I asked them all, girl friends included, to have a drink at my flat that evening. It turned out to be a successful if slightly libidinous party.

Some months later when I was the guest of the

A.A.S.F. for a few days at Rheims, my plane dropped down on an airfield not far from the front line and there was Billy Drake again, sitting in comparative splendour in the local Mayor's house which had been converted into an R.A.F. mess. After this, during the fall of France, he had a series of incredible adventures which included being shot down, machine-gunned while he was floating towards the earth in his parachute, and escaping from a hospital at practically the same moment that the Germans were entering Paris. Since then of course he has been through a great deal and won much glory for himself. He has won even more glory for us. It was nice seeing him again in Malta. I looked carefully to discover whether or not the constant strain of battle and danger had left any mark on him. Apparently it hadn't. He looked a little older perhaps, a little more mature, but that after all is quite natural as he has *almost* reached the age of twenty-five.

They are certainly a strange breed, these young airmen who have stood between us and annihilation. It is difficult not to regard them sentimentally, for we know, or should know, how deeply in their debt we are and shall always be, but of course any hint of this in their presence is unforgivable. I wrote, in a verse about them, 'Theirs is a world we'll never know.' And I think that this is true. They are gay and friendly and easy to get on with; they have a tremendous, almost valedictory, zest for the lighter pleasures of life, they have no time for the gentler, more austere joys; they swear and drink and sing bawdy songs; if any one of them begins to 'shoot a line' he is

mercilessly ragged by his friends; they laugh loudly and sleep soundly when they can and their innermost thoughts are forever secret. Occasionally we on the outside get a glimmering, some slight indication of what is in their hearts; a book that one of them has written; or a letter home that has survived them, but on the whole, they are strangers to us. It is a unique club that they belong to, I suppose the most distinguished in the history of the world. To steel oneself for a crisis; to be fearless in action; to achieve incredible feats of valour and personal bravery, all this we can understand, it is within the scope of our imaginations and bound up with the traditions of our past, but to be continually steeled for crises, to be perpetually valorous and brave for virtually twenty-four hours a day for four years, this is more difficult to grasp. We accept it of course, sometimes I think a trifle too complacently; we listen to them flying overhead while we are lying in bed or talking round the fire. We sometimes say, 'There are a lot going over to-night—I wonder where they're heading for,' and then we return to what we were talking about before the noise of the planes interrupted us. This is not to our discredit. There is nothing to be said really. 'Lie in the dark and let them go——Lie in the dark and listen!' There is nothing else we can do but lie in the dark and let them go but we can at least remember not to let them go too casually, as though it were an ordinary thing, something that they had been born for. They were not born for this. They were born for living and working and falling in love and having children and shaping their own destinies. They were born

to enjoy so many of the pleasures that we older ones have enjoyed for years. Many, many thousands of them have already died before they have even achieved maturity. Many, many thousands more will survive and come back. That is when we must remember these young men. Not personally, because we happened to love certain individuals among them, but as a whole nation which has escaped devastation and possible extinction because of them. I think it will be difficult. Perhaps their world is a simpler, clearer one than ours. We must make every effort to learn their language.

Billy Drake was detailed by the A.O.C. to show me the underground operations rooms. It was most interesting and would have been more so if only I had had the faintest idea what it was all about. It looked to me like a Gargantuan Christmas game from Gamage's, played grimly with strange coloured counters and difficult rules.

Driving down to the aerodrome with the A.O.C. he explained, in a gentle voice and with only slight overdone suavity, how fraught with peril the whole enterprise was. We were to fly in an American plane, a Harvard, and he shot a tremendous line about not having flown this sort of machine for ages and being unsure what knobs to press and what handles to turn. All this convinced me that he was a first-rate pilot and knew exactly what he was about. I was strapped into my 'Mae West,' parachute, rubber dinghy, etc., and rehearsed in the emergency drill which seemed alarmingly complicated, and clambered into the back seat of the plane. We took off smoothly and flew out over the flat sea to Sicily. The 'in-

ter-com' drove me mad. It made a series of wild, rasping shrieks in my ear which I knew to be the A.O.C. explaining things to me but what with his suave diction and one thing and another I didn't understand a word.

The coast of Sicily emerged from the summer haze to greet us. We flew low over the beaches where the landings had been made. There were still some abandoned landing craft about and a few submerged ships and planes. These latter looked unreal, like strange insects congealed in blue amber. Eventually, after passing over Syracuse and more submerged ships in the harbour, we came down at Lentini, which at that time was General Montgomery's H.Q. He wasn't there, being occupied with the battle somewhere beyond Catania. Broadhurst [Air Vice Marshal H. Broadhurst, D.S.O., D.F.C., A.F.C.] met us and I immediately recognised him from the old days at Lympne before the war where we used to give our annual air rallies. He reminded me that at one of these, when I was giving the prizes, I had actually presented him with a medal! I remembered the incident all right but in the light of the present situation I couldn't help feeling a trifle foolish. He was a nice man, tough and with a sense of humour.

We transferred to a frightening contraption called affectionately the 'Whizzer.' This took off without preamble at about thirty-five miles an hour and flew, slowly and casually, over the trees and, as casually, came down on what appeared to be more a potato patch than an airfield. The whole business was scarifying but nobody seemed to mind. We then had some gin in Broadhurst's

comfortable caravan and lunch in the mess. After lunch, and a brief chat with Leslie Clarke who suddenly appeared and is 'Monty's' naval liaison officer, we drove in a car for an hour and a half through various villages. The Sicilians seemed to be delighted to see us and welcomed us vociferously. The war felt very near; there were convoys of lorries returning festooned with half-naked, dusty, healthy-looking troops; blown-up bridges, bomb craters, etc., around which we had to make alarming detours. I took off my shirt and gave myself up to the sun and the dust and baked contentedly.

We finally arrived at Augusta where we drove down to the water front. This was full of activity. There were coloured troops unloading from cargo ships; a smell of sea, seaweed, timber, rope and tar; out in the harbour again those sinister masts of submerged ships sticking out of the water. Presently, after a certain amount of light argument, we embarked in a fast Italian speedboat which, Broadhurst announced proudly, was loot. The casting off was a bit of a shambles on account of the R.A.F. being, not unnaturally, unversed in nautical technique; however we ultimately disentangled ourselves from ropes and anchors and other craft and went dashing off down the coast for about twelve miles.

I should like to be able to say that the enemy shells were whizzing over our heads and that the sound of gunfire nearby was a steady tumultuous roar, but there was no gunfire nearby and the war was miles away and might well have been years away except for the surprising sight of the troops bathing on the beaches completely nude.

What was surprising was not their nudity but the fact that, owing to their bodies and legs having been burnt copper brown and their middles not burned at all, they all looked as though they were wearing rather oddly decorated white bathing drawers. We had a light-hearted nude bathing party ourselves in the middle of the only school of virulent jelly-fish for miles around and then, after a hazardous landing on a beach in course of which we all got very wet indeed, we stepped into the 'Whizzer,' which had obligingly come to fetch us, and flew sedately back to Lentini. Here the A.O.C. and I transferred back into the Harvard, strapped on all our gadgets again, shouted and waved our good-byes and flew back to Malta through the sunset. The light was wonderful and the colour of the sea and sky changed so flamboyantly and swiftly that I almost expected a gentleman to rise out of the sea playing 'Ramona' on a Wurlitzer organ. The 'inter-com' was deafening me with the things the A.O.C. was trying to say to me and all the other things which people were trying to say to somebody else, so I took off the helmet entirely and gave myself up to the beauty of the evening. I popped it on occasionally just in case I had missed the order to bail out. The sun had set when we landed but there was still twilight in the sky and the air was fresh and cool.

After dinner in the A.O.C.'s villa, during which a heated argument took place as to the respective merits of the R.A.F. and the Navy, I was driven back through the starlight to the Palace on the hill reflecting with regret not unmixed with relief that, although I had not actually

experienced the heat of battle, I had visited Sicily while the battle was going on, and, what is more, on the historic day that the Germans made up their minds to evacuate it.

August 13th

Spent the forenoon visiting various ships in the harbour and lunched with Admiral Bisset and Bertie Packer. After lunch I went off with Bertie in the barge and we bathed and lay in the sun all the afternoon. When we got back to the ship I gave a concert for the ship's company. This took place on deck. There was a small wooden platform with a 'Minny' piano and a microphone (thank God) on it; all around, on the deck, on guns, gun-mountings, searchlight platforms, turrets and what not, were sailors. They seemed to me to number several million and as I sat down at the horrid little truncated piano I felt very nervous indeed. Before I started my first song I looked up and observed that the other ships in the harbour were also festooned with sailors . . . there were sailors everywhere, the whole world seemed to be composed of sailors; muscular, sunburned and cheerfully expectant, all set for entertainment and quite, quite convinced that they were going to get it. I need hardly say that I wasn't. I regarded them with a sharp, bright, professional smile and wished with all my soul that the stage, the 'Minny' piano, the microphone and I could suddenly sink to the farthest depths of the sea. I valiantly played a few dashing introductory chords, forgetting in

my agony the abbreviated length of the piano, which resulted in my hands wildly pawing the air both in the treble and the bass. I recovered from this with a still more metallic smile and started to sing. The microphone was good and my nerves soon dropped away from me. The men began to laugh early and were so friendly and receptive that presently I discovered that I was almost enjoying myself.

When it was all over they cheered and the further-off audience in the other ships cheered too; that was the finishing touch. I suddenly felt stricken and stood there, unable to move, with the sting of tears in my eyes, profoundly grateful to them for having been so very easily pleased. This is not false modesty or affectation. I knew so well how much better a performance I could have given them if only the conditions had been a little easier. If only I had had an expert accompanist and concentrated light and more freedom of movement, if only I had a rich, strong voice instead of a reedy sort of croon, if only I had had the attack and technique of Al Jolson, Gracie Fields, Maurice Chevalier and Paul Robeson rolled into one. If only—if only——! I wonder how many performers go through these awful little personal post-mortems after giving a show? Most of them, I expect. There are times when I know I'm good; others when I know beyond a shadow of doubt that I am forced and bad. To-day lay somewhere between. I had given nothing more than an adequate performance to an audience that deserved the best in the world. I wonder if they knew.

August 14th

Took off at eight o'clock in a DC-3. It was a troop-carrying machine with bottom-aching aluminium seats along the sides. These I wisely ignored and curled myself up on the floor on some 'Mae Wests' and baggage and tarpaulins. There were fourteen passengers, all soldiers except for a pallid Maltese woman and her husband. There was one officer, a Colonel, George Kersley. We chatted and exchanged pieces of chocolate and nips out of my flask. It was an uneventful journey and, I suppose, uncomfortable compared with the luxury flying of peace-time but on the whole I rather enjoyed it. There is a certain pleasant abandon in lying on the floor and not minding how dirty you get. I was wearing a khaki shirt and shorts like everybody else (except the Maltese lady) and I slept most of the time. We flew over Tobruk and came down to re-fuel at Benina. The blazing desert heat hit us in the face as we got out of the plane. We had a hunk of bread and cheese and some warm, brackish lemonade in a canteen and got back into the plane again. I sat up in front with the pilot and he pointed out to me the scenes of the desert war; Benghazi, Hell-Fire Pass, etc. It all looked grim and arid enough now in peace. It must have been sheer unbridled hell in war.

At about seven o'clock in the evening we sighted the Nile Delta in the distance; a spread of dark rich green lying across that eternal desert like a carpet. The Pyramids showed up clearly in the setting sun but they looked

minute, like models in some Luna Park panorama; behind them, in the further distance, were palm trees and the tiny clustered dolls' houses of Cairo. We circled round the desert aerodrome and slowly came down; the air became hotter and hotter; we landed smoothly and by the time we had taxied along to the reception hut the sun had gone and it was dark. The A.D.C. rang me up from the Embassy to say that he was expecting me. I was met by a gentleman from E.N.S.A.—I can't think why, but it was very civil of him—and a Major Pennington who was a Welfare officer. He drove me into Cairo, stopping for a drink on the way at Mena House. The commanding officer at the airport who had received me most hospitably and given me a drink had mentioned, ruefully, that all the stars and big shots came through that airport and nobody had yet suggested giving a show for them. I immediately said that I would with pleasure and arranged to do a concert for them next Thursday.

It felt strange to be driving along that familiar straight road from the Pyramids to Cairo again, I have done it so often in the past. It seemed to be comparatively unchanged except for the addition of a glittering new open-air night club called the Auberge des Pyramides which was conforming very little to the blackout regulations. As we drew nearer to the city I noticed that all the buildings, or nearly all, were blazing with lights. But even so it was *supposed* to be a blackout. The air was soft and hot; expensive cars whizzed by; as we crossed the well-remembered bridge over the Nile I could see the feluccas—I think they are called feluccas—with their curved

white sails gleaming in the moonlight; the crowded pavements of the city were also ablaze with light and there was the usual cacophony of street noises; shouts and yells, motor horns, klaxons and a thudding noise in the background as though a lot of people were banging invisible tin trays.

Upon arrival at the Embassy I was received by Norman Smith, a South African Captain who is the only A.D.C. in residence here at the moment as Miles and Jackie [Lord and Lady Killearn] and the rest of the staff are in Alexandria. There was a note from Miles bidding me welcome to stay as long as I liked and to join them in Alex as soon as I cared to. I talked to Jeff [Wing Commander the Earl Amherst] on the telephone; he is coming round in the morning. It will be grand seeing him again after three years. I bathed and changed luxuriously and then Norman and I dined and went out on the town for an hour or so. Before going to bed we swam in the new bathing pool in the Embassy gardens which was a present from Field Marshal Smuts to Miles. The moon was bright and the trees rustled romantically in the warm breeze. This really did feel far away from the war; it was hard to believe that only a year ago the Germans were approximately fifty miles away.

I went to bed at about twelve o'clock and the smooth luxury of the house and everything in it, the Nile rippling by outside and the distant sounds of the city lulled me immediately to sleep.

August 15th

This house really is lovely to come back to. It is cool and beautifully run. I had breakfast on my verandah overlooking the Nile; the air was misty blue and the palms on the opposite bank were pale and grey like feathers. Jeff arrived looking far from well, I thought. He was terribly thin and there was a drawn, drained look about him. He has been suffering a good deal lately from 'gippy tummy' which afflicts everybody here at one time or another. He has also been working very hard. Personally I don't believe that his inside has ever been quite right since that nightmare morning thirteen years ago when we were travelling through the Indo-Chinese jungle and he was suddenly stricken with amœbic dysentery and nearly died. Having arrived out here in 1940 with his rightful rank of Major in the Coldstream Guards he is now, surprisingly enough, a Wing Commander in the R.A.F. and a Liaison Officer on Dick Casey's staff.

We had a drink before lunch sitting on the terrace at Shepherd's. The restrictions of war-time are unknown; people sat there sipping gin slings and cocktails and chatting and gossiping, waiters glided about wearing fezzes and inscrutable Egyptian expressions. There were uniforms everywhere of all ranks and services and nationalities including Constance Carpenter in a natty sharkskin two piece with E.N.S.A. on her epaulettes. These uniforms indicated that perhaps somewhere in the vague outside world there might be a war of some sort going on.

This place is the last refuge of the soi-disant 'International Set.' All the fripperies of pre-war luxury living are still in existence here; rich people, idle people, cocktail parties, dinner parties, jewels and evening dress. Rolls-Royces come purring up to the terrace steps; the same age-old Arabs sell the same age-old carpets and junk; scruffy little boys dart in between the tables shouting 'Bourse! Bourse!' which when translated means the 'Egyptian Times.' There is a perpetual undercurrent of social and political feuds and, excepting for a brief period when the 'Flap' was on and the Germans were expected to march in at any moment, here they have all stayed, with the exception of the men on leave, floating about lazily in this humid backwater for four long years. It was odd to see all this going on again, enjoyable of course for a brief, a very brief, visit but it felt rather old-fashioned and almost lacking in taste.

Nothing much of interest to report. I lunched with Jeff and dined with Eric Dunstan and Connie at the Auberge des Pyramides. The dinner was excellent and the band not bad. The whole place seemed to be trying to achieve a Château de Madrid atmosphere but it didn't quite succeed.

August 16th

Spent the morning interviewing various Military Welfare high-ups. They were all called by complicated initials and I became very confused. H.Q., which is a vastly overcrowded hive of questionable efficiency, is fortified

up to the hilt. Myriads of people work away in their offices secure in the knowledge that they are surrounded by barbed wire, guns, pill-boxes and sentries and are still further protected by a bureaucratic system of rules and regulations and passes signed and counter-signed. I had a feeling that if I had arrived with a smoking bomb in my hands I should have been allowed in with it immediately providing that I had filled in the correct form. There is no doubt that, as a nation, we have an uncontrolled passion for needless formalities. As far as I was concerned everything was comparatively easy for I was led up and down stairs, along passages and in and out of rooms by Major Pennington. The officers I talked to were charming to me and General Linsell asked me to go to Iraq and visit 'Paiforce.' He warned me that it was the worst possible time of the year, that the climate was hell, that there was a lot of sandfly fever and malaria, and that the whole trip would be the acme of arid discomfort, but, he added, the troops there had had practically nothing in the way of entertainment and needed it desperately. I said I'd go of course and that was that. Now the arrangements are being made; lots of people in lots of offices with lots of typewriters are busily working out itineraries and transport forms and cypher signals and what not and I do so very much hope that it will turn out to be worth it.

Pennington ('Penny') has been detailed to me as a sort of glorified A.D.C., wet nurse and theatrical agent. I am glad because he couldn't be nicer. He has already procured me an accompanist; a quiet boy called George

Worthington who makes dance-band piano arrangements. I rehearsed with him for a couple of hours and I should think he would be good. He is a little lacking in vitality but he is quite obviously a determined and hard worker.

Had a cocktail before lunch at the Mohammed Ali Club.

The Caseys [Mr. and Mrs. Richard Casey] aren't here but Lord Moyne took me out to swim in their pool, which was pleasant and refreshing. They are expected back at any minute.

I dined quietly with Jeff and Eric and came home early.

August 17th

Lunched with Sholto Douglas, who hinted that there might be a possibility of his lending me his private plane when I go to Beirut.

Called on several people during the day and gathered a certain amount of varied information none of which is particularly relevant to this diary. The whole place is alive with intrigue and rather archaic E. Phillips Oppenheim nonsense. I suppose some of it matters but I am quite sure that most of it doesn't.

Jeff and I dined with the Caseys. Their house is out at Mena, just near the Pyramids. Chester Beatty, who built it, planned with uncanny skill a completely encircling grove of casuarina trees so that there is no view at all and a great many mosquitoes. The house itself is lux-

urious and the oriental courtyard with a tinkling fountain in the middle of it reminded me forcibly of the second act of 'Kismet.' It was really nice seeing the Caseys again. Dick, who has been ill, is now in fine form and so is Maie. They have both been staying with Louis [General Sir Edward Spears, K.B.E., C.B., M.C., M.P.] and Mary Spears [Lady Spears (Mary Borden, the novelist)] in Beirut. It was a gay evening and passed far too quickly. However I am to stay with them on my way back.

August 18th

In the morning I gave interviews to various people and rehearsed with George Worthington. Miles arrived looking larger than ever and in cracking good spirits; I am going to Alex with him on Friday for the weekend.

In the evening we went to dine with Alexander Kirk, the American Minister, a gentle, witty man. He seems to have several houses. The one we dined in was just near the Pyramids. It was a perfect night and we ate an exquisite dinner on the roof. There was a canopy above our heads and after dinner we relaxed on vast divans and talked and enjoyed our coffee and brandy. The whole setting was enchanting. A sky blazing with stars, the lights of the Cairo blackout twinkling in the distance, the moon slowly coming up and silvering the Pyramids and the desert hills stretching away into the distance. An authentically romantic atmosphere in the finest Egyptian tradition shattered beyond redemption by the flat-footed arrival of the visiting American Senators. Why, when

there are so many millions of delightful Americans, people of good spirits, vitality, gaiety and light hearts, people of resilience, wit and adaptability, should such an uninspiring group of men be sent on an overseas mission? It wasn't that they were malign or evilly disposed—at least I don't think they were—it wasn't that they were rude or even controversial; they conversed, without distinction but quite amiably, in fact their behaviour was above reproach, but oh, my God, they were dull. They lay on the evening, not like a wet blanket exactly, but more like an all-enveloping, cumbersome travelling rug. Alexander Kirk, the Caseys and I behaved with unparalleled social gallantry but I have a dreadful suspicion that it was all in vain. At the end of the evening the whole clutch of them piled into a car and drove away into the lovely moonlit night, grey, aggressively homespun figures, leaving behind them a feeling of depletion and exhaustion as though the air had been turned off at the main.

On the way home Miles and I stopped off at the Auberge to have a drink. Our entrance was impressive. Any entrance with Miles is impressive. Everybody bowed and scraped and we were led in state to a table next to the King's. I was so placed that I was able to study him without appearing to stare. I found it almost impossible to believe that he is only twenty-three. He is a big, fine-looking young man with a small beard which I believe once inspired one of his subjects to shout, 'God shave the King.' This is his own story so I can quote it without *lèse-majesté*. When he and his party got up he came over

to our table and Miles presented me. The King was most agreeable to me, and said that when I returned he would arrange a little party. He then asked me, rather sharply I thought, why I was here and I told him truthfully enough that I had come out for the Ministry of Information. This apparently fascinated him because he explained to someone later that he was much impressed by my honesty! I can only assume that he believes the M. of I. to be the headquarters of the most sinister secret activities.

When he had gone we called for the bill and discovered that he had given orders that we were to be his guests. This saddened me as I had only had a beer and two packets of Gold Flakes. Miles however had had a cigar.

August 19th

Gave interviews and rehearsed most of the day. Lunched with Terence and Sophie Shone, whom I had not seen since Washington. He is Chargé d'Affaires here. It was a delightful lunch in a beautifully cool house, just them and Miles and me.

At five o'clock I drove out with Miles and Sholto to the Cairo West airport, the one at which I had arrived, and gave them a forty-five-minute concert. After this we dined with Sholto at Air House. Whitney Straight appeared and reluctantly, after a great deal of pressing, told us the story of his adventures in France and his ultimate escape. He was shot down sometime in 1941, I believe. It was a thrilling story and he told it movingly and

with understatement. The experience has changed him too. I don't know whether or not he realises this but it is true. He was always attractive and pleasant to meet and he still is but he has gained something extra now.

August 20th

Got up at six-thirty and had breakfast and at eight o'clock drove with Miles to the station. Arnold Wigglesworth, another A.D.C., came too, looking slightly battered after what I suspect was a gay night on the town. The whole procedure was a model of courteous autocracy and would have curdled the life blood of the 'Daily Worker.' Everyone saluted and genuflected and people were herded to one side to let us pass. In point of fact it reminded me very much of Moscow in 1939 when I was driving out to the suburbs in a taxi and was ordered to draw into the side of the road as one of the more eminent Government officials was driving down to his country house. On this particular morning the whole performance was let down by the fact that the ambassadorial private car, owing to an oversight, was not on the train at all. The effect was that of a Bateman drawing but only for a little while as the railway company, realising their social blunder, went to work with terrific promptness and dispatch and, in no time at all, a special engine came bustling up with the private car and hitched it on to the train. Miles was annoyed but controlled it superbly and we climbed in with some hauteur and, after we had flung open the windows in order to dissipate the overpowering

smell of Flit, we settled down to a luxurious and uneventful journey. Miles retired to a bedroom, I retired to the other bedroom and the wretched Arnold went into a coma in the saloon.

The last time I did this journey with Miles was during the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty negotiations. On that occasion the splendour had been overwhelming because we had had not only a special car but an entire special train. The whole business in those days was a bi-annual affair. Twice a year that royal train made the official journey from Cairo to Alexandria and, at the turn of the season, back again from Alexandria to Cairo. In those days Miles was High Commissioner and the staff of the Residency together with all their mothers and fathers and wives and other relatives made the journey en masse. I remember that we had a delicious lunch and a good deal of excellent wine after which, what with the vibration of the train and the heat, we not unnaturally fell into a deep sleep all over the saloon. Unfortunately we slept a thought too heavily and never noticed that we were drawing into the station at Alexandria. I woke first and observed, outside on the platform, a military and naval guard of honour, yards of red carpet and Admiral Sir Charles Forbes standing firmly to attention. I gave a muffled scream and we all, including the High Commissioner, and several high-ranking officials, scrambled to our knees and tried to get our hair smoothed down and our shirts and ties adjusted and our coats on without being seen by the waiting guard of honour. This necessitated the whole proceeding taking place on the floor.

It was, on the whole, one of the most hilariously funny sights I have ever seen, and our dignity, when we finally emerged in the wake of the High Commissioner, was quite beyond praise.

This time when we arrived there was no guard of honour except Glynne Bernand, the third A.D.C., and, after the luggage had been disgorged, we drove off immediately to look at Miles's race horses, one of which took a mad fancy to me and licked my arm violently until it was quite sore. I am seldom as successful as this with horses and felt extremely flattered.

When we arrived at the house and I had greeted Jacqueline and congratulated her on the new baby, Glynne whisked me off to the beach for a swim before lunch. It was a pleasant beach, rather Lido-ish with all the paraphernalia of beach-pyjamas, gaily coloured bathing tents, and very consciously sunburned young Egyptian gentlemen parading up and down.

In the afternoon, accompanied by Miles and Jackie and Union Jacks and outriders, I went to a garden party in order to be filmed mingling with convalescent troops. This was enjoyable because the troops were so nice and friendly. A number of well-dressed Egyptian ladies twittered about and served an excellent tea, our appreciation of which was rather convulsive because we had to keep stopping with our cups or cakes in mid air while the ardent photographers snapped us.

In the evening we dined late and went to a charity fete. There were thousands of people in the last stages of evening dress; and sideshows, dancing and baccarat. The

King was there in a convivial mood and a white dinner jacket; we had an amiable but highly strung little conversation. He couldn't possibly have been more courteous or charming but I had the feeling that he was somehow nervous. The local gossip is that he doesn't care for the English very much but I can only say that if this is the case he dissembled it as far as I was concerned with the most exquisite diplomacy.

August 21st

Nothing eventful to report. Went to buy some mosquito boots and shirts and slacks for my journey to Iraq. Had tea with Lilia Ralli. I thought she seemed a little sad and troubled which is not surprising really. To be here where everything is so luxurious and detached while her own country is going through such a dreadful time can't be very pleasant. Dined at the Mohammed Ali Club; gambled, reasonably successfully, and was very, very late getting home.

August 22nd

The day broke fair and excessively warm but I didn't notice it as I slept until twelve o'clock when, with my breakfast tray on my knees, I gave an interview to Larry Darrell who lived in Corfu and writes poems. Scott-Watson appeared too. Just before the war he was stationed for a while in Danzig and he told me, to my keen amusement, that the whole Nazi entourage had been in a fine frenzy about my mysterious visit to Burk-

hardt there in June 1939. I should think that I must be on the German black list as Mata Hari number seven!

Jack Dundas and Lilia came to lunch, after which I rehearsed with George and we set off to a large convalescent camp where I gave a concert and afterwards made an appearance in the N.A.A.F.I. canteen. This was hell as it was a vast place crowded with troops and there was no 'mike.' I tried to make myself heard but without much success so I quickly sang some popular choruses and they all joined in and everything was all right.

August 23rd

Penny called for me at eight-thirty and drove me to the aerodrome where I was met by a young Flight Lieutenant called Peter Morgan. He had flown from Cairo in Sholto's private plane to pick me up. It was a dual-control Proctor and we took off immediately as we had to be in Lydda by lunchtime. The flight was, at moments, a trifle uncomfortable for me owing to the dual-control apparatus getting in the way of my legs; giving me cramp and frequently sending both cheeks of my behind into deep slumber. Apart from this minor disadvantage I enjoyed the journey very much.

At Lydda I lunched with Sholto, who was on his way back from Cypress in a Liberator. After lunch we inspected a W.A.A.F. camp and Sholto made a speech to them and everyone saluted and sprang to attention and generally acquitted themselves in a most impressive manner.

At three o'clock Morgan and I took off again. It was only an hour's flight to Beirut. We flew along the coast over Haifa and the towns of Tyre and Sidon. In the harbour of Sidon there is an ancient ruined fort, a jagged grey shadow in the sea. The mountains a little way behind the coastline were spectacular; on the highest peaks of some of them there was still a sprinkling of snow. Beirut looked alluring from the air and as we circled round the airport and began to come down all the multi-coloured houses and tree-lined streets sprang into their right perspective and became real and life size. The runway of the Beirut airport is short and Peter said that he has kittens every time he has to land a Hudson on to it. With the Proctor of course it was far less agitating.

Francis Stoner met me bearing a letter of welcome from Mary. He took both Peter and me to a picturesque South of France-ish villa on the edge of the sea where we had tea with a Brigadier and then went and bathed at the Bains Militaires.

At about seven o'clock, having dropped Peter off at the Officers' Club, Francis and I drove up through the dusk to Aley. In the summer the Spears' Mission house in Beirut is too hot and so they live in the mountains. It was only a half an hour's drive but the change of climate was quite violent. The house stands on the edge of a precipice; opposite are ranges of mountains and, to the left, the town of Beirut and the sea. It was all a little reminiscent of the South of France and a bit like Beverly Hills too but it had a definite quality of its own.

We dined on the terrace and the moon came up with

the fish. There are strange rock formations round the terrace giving it a Wagnerian air. Louis said, irreverently, that it always gave him the feeling that he was dining inside a hollow tooth. I had only seen Mary once, in Paris, since the beginning of the war and she seemed singularly unchanged. She appears, on the whole, to enjoy being a Minister's wife and refers to Louis either as Bee, the Minister or the Gen., which is slightly confusing to strangers. Louis is harassed, I think, which is not surprising considering the situation here which is tricky to say the least of it. There are the Lebanese, the French, most of them still trailing clouds of Vichy, the Syrians, and our own fighting services. The presidential elections begin at the end of the week and there is almost certain to be an orgy of graft, chicanery, blackmail, ballot-cooking and general Oriental-cum-Latin exuberance. That there will be bloodshed is a foregone conclusion but I imagine that what is worrying the Gen. is how much! As far as Lebanon is concerned the whole war was over when we occupied Syria; now all parties, Syrian, French and Lebanese, are back at the old racket of who is going to dominate who. No wonder poor Louis looks harassed.

Mary is as witty and charming as ever. I attacked her gently for not having written a word since the war but she explained, reasonably enough, that, what with having paraded back and forth through the desert fighting areas with her hospital unit and now having to deal tactfully with charities and social junketings among the Lebanese and the French, she really hadn't had much time. I have a feeling however that perhaps somewhere in

some recess of her mind an idea for a novel about these peculiar years may be slowly germinating. I hope so at any rate. I live in a guest house and have my own private terrace. Before going to bed I sat for quite a long while in the cool air looking at those biblical mountains in the starlight.

August 24th

Mary and I visited a leave camp. It is on the edge of the sea and has a perfect bathing beach. Here the troops come from all over the country to have a week's rest and do exactly what they like. There are no restrictions or discipline of any kind and, if they want to, they can even go into the town and get happily sozzled for which the only penalty is imposed by Nature in the form of a hangover; even this can be swiftly mitigated by a plunge into the sea. They are efficiently waited on and are allowed to have morning tea brought to them in bed. I was most impressed by the whole set-up. There was an atmosphere of genuine cheerfulness and relaxation about the place.

I talked to several of the men. They were homesick of course and plied me with questions, many of which I should have been unable to answer if I had not fortunately done that twenty-eight weeks' tour. As it was however I could talk to men from Hull, Nottingham, Inverness, Glasgow, Cardiff, etc., with the added authority of having been to these towns recently. Some of their questions were quite routine; 'How's Sauchiehall Street?'—

'Is it still raining in the Oxford Road' or 'Is the Tower still open in Blackpool?' Some however were more personal and touching and betrayed a certain unexpressed worry in their minds. I came across this same uneasiness often among many of the men I talked to all through the Middle East. Most of them treated it gaily of course, made a joke of it, but I could see that it was there gnawing at them behind the gaiety and behind the light words.

This little, not very carefully formulated unhappiness is concerned with the presence in England of American and Dominion troops. I should imagine that a good deal of it has been deliberately fostered by enemy propaganda and also by careless and irresponsible letters from home. The press too have contributed to it by their usual habit of headlining some localised scandal in such a way as to imply that the incident described is the rule rather than the exception to it. These men sitting out there in desert camps with nothing much to contend with in the way of enemy action, but a great deal to contend with in the way of loneliness and boredom, have a lot of time in which to think and jump to conclusions. The conclusions they jump to are fairly obvious and generally wrong but it is not their fault. They read in the papers of England being overrun by Canadians and Americans flinging their money about and striking up friendships with their sweethearts and sisters and wives, and, perfectly naturally, jealousy and doubt begin to torment them. I explained to a number of them as clearly as I could that they were building up delusions in their minds. During the last nine months I have had many opportunities of seeing at

first hand conditions in London and in all principal provincial towns and I can honestly say that at least ninety per cent of the American and Dominions troops I have encountered in pubs, trains, tubes, etc., were behaving as cheerfully and courteously as our own men. The bad behavers are among the left-over ten per cent and it is maddening to reflect that one arrogant, silly remark, one unkind cut at our war effort or our social and political systems, can wipe from the memory five hundred courtesies. It is still more maddening to see with what relish the cheaper press highlight some scurrilous little incident involving an English girl and an Allied soldier, without realising that, apart from the immediate triumph of getting a 'scoop' for their paper, they are sowing seeds of suspicion and unhappiness in the minds of thousands of our fighting men who are isolated and far away and have no opportunity of checking up for themselves. This mischievous scandal-mongering is of course doing grave disservice to our war effort and our peace effort too; above all it is carelessly and casually inflicting harm on the men to whom we owe everything and who deserve nothing but the best from us.

August 25th

The Arab food is highly spiced, delicious and very rich. I had a great deal of it last night at a Lebanese party which took place on a roof hung with coloured lights overlooking a ravine with other clusters of lighted houses on the other side. I cannot help emphasising this thrill of

seeing again lighted houses and lighted streets. I didn't know how deeply the dreariness of the blackout had burrowed into me. There was nothing else remarkable beneath the visiting moon at this particular party beyond the fact that I was stung by a wasp and ate far too much and, astonishing to relate, felt no ill effects afterwards.

The Lebanese ladies are wealthy and rather ornately dressed. They wear a great deal of baroque jewellery which I fear is real. They seem to be quite happy with the British occupation although I suspect that they would never betray it if they were not. It was an enjoyable evening on the whole and had a quality of unreality about it. I felt as though I were appearing in a novel by Pierre Loti. I shall come back to this country later on. I should like to see what it is like when there *really* isn't a war on.

August 26th

Gyles Isham came to lunch with us in our 'Spears Mission—Strictelement Privée' bathing hut at the Bains Militaires. Having been all through the desert war he is now doing an Intelligence job here. After lunch we swam and then, with the Lebanese and comparatively Free French whooping and diving all round us, we sat on a rock and discussed, most affectionately, Lilian Braithwaite. The best sort of actors make good soldiers but however resigned they become to Army life and however keen and determined they may be, the 'Old Pro.' is liable to rise up in them at the least encouragement. I have noticed this over and over again.

Gyles is doing an exceedingly interesting job and doing it very well too, but in spite of the strange, exciting, uncomfortable, frightening, dramatic years he has lived through since he left England, the theatre still holds first place in his heart. I expect this is true of men in other professions but it is only natural that I should notice it more strongly in actors. They deluge me with questions as to who is playing what and whether or not such and such a play had good notices; they get hold of month-old newspapers and scan the theatre news, and they dream longingly of the day when they can come back and endure the nervousness and anxieties of dress-rehearsals and first nights. I have found little or no bitterness in them regarding their more fortunate colleagues who, for one reason or another, have been able to stay at home and get on with their careers. Some of them of course say half jokingly that they doubt if anyone will ever give them a job again. This particularly applies to those who were only just beginning to make their way when the war started. They feel, with a certain amount of justification, I fear, that they had not had the time to ensure themselves being remembered. They feel also that amid the stresses and strains of Army life they might have forgotten the little they had ever learned. My contention is, however, that although they might not have progressed as technical actors they have probably learned a good deal more than those who stayed at home. At all events when the war is finally over and done with it will be up to the heads of the profession and all the principal managers to see that these men get their chance. I have my

own very definite views about this and intend to put them into practice the moment the time comes.

Gyles was gay over all this and cheerfully visualised himself flogging through the provinces in Shakespearian Rep. indefinitely. I wonder how much, during those future years, he will miss all this enforced contact with the sterner realities of life and death?

August 27th

Took off from Beirut in a Hudson at nine o'clock, slightly apprehensive on account of the shortness of the runway, and arrived safely at Lydda, just before ten. There I found George waiting for me having left Cairo at seven. I had a cup of tea with Alan Dawkins, who bet me a bottle of gin that I wouldn't remember his name when I returned and then, together with George and about fifteen other bodies, I clambered into a DC-3, settled myself upon some tarpaulins at the back and prepared to relax. The heat while we were waiting to take off was really infernal and sweat poured off everyone; however, once we were up it became cool and I slept most of the way. At about two o'clock we dropped down at Habbaniyah where I was met by the station commander, who looked exactly like Edward Everett Horton. Getting out of the plane felt like stepping into a blast furnace; the glare was blinding and there was a scorching hot wind. The station commander said airily how lucky it was that I had happened to pick a cool day! In his house, which was really cool and most luxurious, I found

Peter Haddon with a small white moustache and a large mug of iced beer. I was delighted to see him again; his phraseology was as fantastic as ever and his whole personality, in spite of a faint service patina, remained that of a lovable musical-comedy 'dude.' He has been doing a fine job in these parts and North Africa ever since the war started. He travels about with his own small staff and radio equipment and transmits personal messages home from the troops. Again there was that passionate interest in what was going on in theatrical London. We talked shop steadily all through lunch.

In the afternoon I was flown to Bagdad in an archaic machine that looked as though it had never quite recovered from triumphantly flying the channel in 1910. My pilot was a fine-looking young man who turned out to be Cecil Humphreys' son. There is certainly a good deal of Wardour Street blood coursing through these desert sands.

Bagdad looked fascinating from the air. Minarets, mosques, date palms and camels in the best Oscar Asche tradition. The Tigris winds through the town, its banks lined with opulent oriental palaces, and the heat when we landed was worse than Habbaniyah. I was met by General Pownall's A.D.C. and whisked away along a palm-fringed road that was so dusty that everything looked out of focus. It was only a short drive to the General's house but it was long enough for me to realise that Bagdad from the air may be fascinating and fraught with Eastern glamour but that, close to, it is one of the least attractive places I have ever seen. It is stifling, dirty

and without charm. General Pownall however was friendly, clean and had great charm, also an engaging twinkle in his eye. We had tea and several long glasses of lemonade. In that climate it is impossible not to drink incessantly. After this, and sweating profusely, I went off to the broadcasting place where I was met by Peter Scott, who placed me in a small, entirely airless room in which I rehearsed with George for an hour. I did a thirty-five-minute broadcast during which, like Gypsy Rose Lee, I slowly stripped so that by the end of it I was virtually naked. I don't think I ever remember being quite so hot in my life. When this was over and I had rubbed myself down and drunk a great deal more—this time not only lemonade—I went back to the house, had a bath and changed. General Pownall had arranged a small dinner party consisting of a few Army and Air Force officers and a small baby donkey which he had bought for three pounds ten. It was a beguiling animal and nuzzled everybody under the mistaken impression that it was a dear little lap-dog. We dined on the terrace looking across at the winking lights on the other side of the river; the air, although not cool, was cooler and the wail of Arab music came to us intermittently from the town. For a little while, aided by the tactful darkness, Bagdad was almost as romantic as I had expected it to be.

August 28th

Spent the morning going over the principal military hospital. There were mostly medical cases, sandfly, ma-

laria, dysentery, etc. The men looked drained by the heat, poor fellows, but every one I spoke to managed to smile and tried gallantly to give the impression that he was not nearly as bad as he looked. The hospital staff, God knows how, contrived to keep the wards comparatively cool but, of course, only comparatively. Nothing and no one could be really cool in Bagdad at this time of the year. It was sad to think that, even when they did recover and were convalescent and given leave, there was nowhere for them to go except back to their units or perhaps to a rest camp for a few days. At all events there was no way for them to escape the climate. Many of them were in hospital for the third and fourth time with the same complaint. Tropical fevers recur with dreary persistence. I would have given anything to have been able to lay before them, like a rug, the Romney marshes on a wet Spring evening with the mist rising from the dykes and a cool breeze blowing in from the sea; or the cliffs of Tintagel with the gorse out; or a stretch of the Yorkshire moors between Saltburn and Whitby in the Autumn when the heather is out. Some of them, I feel sure, would have been perfectly content to settle for Deansgate, Princes Street or Hammersmith Broadway.

In the evening after tea the press had the startling idea of photographing General Pownall and me in the garden with the Moke. Had the idea come off I am sure it would have resulted in a most provocative and fascinating art study. Unfortunately however the Moke refused to co-operate; it became petulant and temperamental, bit the General sharply in the thigh and refused, so the General

and I were taken sitting on a wall and staring at each other with embarrassing intensity.

I gave two concerts in the evening. The first one at seven-thirty and the second at ten. I performed in a pleasant garden overlooking the river and the 'mike' and piano were both good. The first concert came under the heading of F.C.M.B.U. (First-Class Military Balls Up). This was really the fault of an amiable Colonel who was, wrongly, in charge of Welfare. He had mild eyes and the sort of moustache that one gets out of a cracker, and he had been remarkably inefficient in organising transport for the troops with the result that the seats were only three quarters full. This was particularly irritating as I knew perfectly well that in different regiments stationed nearby the men had been drawing lots for tickets. It was too late obviously to do anything about it and the ones who were there were a terrific audience and so that was that. In between concerts I bathed and changed in Tom Murray's house. He works for the British Council and had kindly provided the stage and garden. The second concert was packed out and a riotous success. General Pownall made a graceful speech, everybody cheered, George and I bathed and changed again, were given supper and went to bed.

August 29th

A hell of a day really with only a few alleviating moments. To begin with we took off in a Blenheim at seven o'clock, which seemed a trifle early after our activities

of the night before. George packed himself into the back with the suitcases and music and I sat next to the pilot. He was a sergeant-pilot and rather taciturn. The flight took three hours and was immeasurably boring, just sand, interminable, everlasting sand as far as the eye could see. However, finally it was over and we landed at Shaibah. I may have mentioned casually that it was hot in Habaniyah and Bagdad but compared with Shaibah they were as fresh and invigorating as the Outer Hebrides. The heat rose up from the ground and enveloped us and pressed down from the airless sky onto our heads; it shimmered visibly all round like the fumes from a burning brazier. Shaibah consists of Nissen huts, hangars and sand. There is nothing else whatever except of course aeroplanes to go in the hangars and several thousand men to gasp the hours away both inside and outside the Nissen huts.

I was met by a kindly Colonel in the Indian Army and led into the R.A.F. mess where we had some lemonade and light conversation. This only lasted a little while as we had to drive to Basra, or rather to Margil, which is a couple of miles away from it. The drive took an hour and was unmitigated hell. The Colonel had decided, unwisely I think, to drive the car himself and let his native driver sit in the back with George. The unwiseness of this became apparent early because, whereas the driver knew the twists and turns of the desert road, the Colonel quite palpably did not. There were no outward and visible signs of whether we were on the right track or not because the whole world was composed of sand. We did

a lot of backing and turning and convulsive leaps forward and the bumping was so violent that I felt that I had no bone in my body left intact. Eventually, much to everyone's surprise, we arrived at an oasis of dusty palm trees and got, thank God, onto a more or less reasonable road. Presently we arrived at the Colonel's house which was quite pleasant and in this we sat and looked at each other for an hour. The conversation languished, not, let it be understood, from any lack of good feeling, but merely because the Colonel was not by nature a vivacious raconteur and I was extremely tired and was intent on conserving what was left of my energy for the two concerts I knew I had to give before the day was out. A batman occasionally blundered in and out wearing a contemptuous expression, and large angry insects hurled themselves hysterically against the netted windows.

At one o'clock we went to the British Club where I was given a lot of gin and sweated more and more. After lunch in the mess I retired to bed, rammed some 'Quies' into my ears and went into a coma for a couple of hours. I was awakened by the arrival of Dick Malone, who had flown especially from Abbadan to see me. He and the Colonel and I had tea together, brought to us resentfully by the furious batman. After this we piled into the car and set off to Shaibah again across that same desert road. The heat was perhaps a fraction less but the bumping was worse than ever. Upon arrival I gave a concert in a large hangar to several thousand men. This made everything worth while; they were tremendously enthusiastic and all consciousness of heat and discomfort and tired-

ness dropped away from me when I reflected that they had to endure all that I had to and worse, sometimes for over two years. I felt ashamed that I had grumbled for a moment, even to myself.

Unfortunately, I was unable to sustain this noble attitude for long because the moment the concert was over I was allowed to have one drink, happily a strong one, and was shepherded by the Colonel into the car again and driven back over the same damned road to Basra. Here, more dead than alive, I gave, almost immediately, my second concert in a garden next to a railway siding. I can't feel that this performance was one of my best. I am capable, if necessary, of handling difficult audiences; of rising above minor production difficulties such as bad acoustics, insecure stages, eccentric lighting, etc., but never in all my experience have I had to compete with engine whistles and goods trucks being shunted back and forth only a few yards away from me. I bawled through the microphone; I tried frantically to get my points over in the pauses between the puffings and whistlings and clankings. I gave such an abandoned display of facial expressions that the audience must have thought me either dotty or blind drunk. I looked occasionally at poor George pounding away on an execrable piano and was rewarded by a pitying smile. Finally the ordeal came to an end. The audience behaved with great kindness and courtesy and I retired home with the Colonel in a state of suicidal exhaustion.

August 30th

At six o'clock the batman wakened me with a snarl and a cup of tea. The Colonel had mercifully arranged for the Blenheim to pick us up at the Basra airport at seven. I shall never understand why it had not brought me there in the first place. If it had I should have been saved at least one of those sadistic drives. However, off we went, I waved effusive good-byes to the Colonel and settled myself for the four hours' monotony before we arrived at Habbaniyah. Upon arrival dear Edward Everett Horton (whose name was really Attwood) greeted me like a long-lost friend and, after a nice cool drink, we went off to the hospital. Habbaniyah is an astonishing place. It is a permanent air station in peace or war and a great deal of money had been spent on it. It is a stop in the England-to-India flight and the flying boats land on the lake. The desert had been irrigated and reclaimed and so consequently there is a lot of green and many flowers of all sorts and kinds. The relief of this after eternities of sand is considerable.

I was impressed by the hospital. It is one of the finest I have ever seen outside America. It has a lot of the most advanced modern equipment including certain air-conditioned wards and shining operating theatres. The matron and the personnel were all enthusiasts and I made a private vow that if I were taken ill anywhere in the Middle East that would be the place I should make for. As in the hospital at Bagdad most of the patients

were medical rather than surgical although there were a few accident and burn cases. I spent about two hours going through the wards and saw and talked to as many men as I could in the time.

After this Attwood took me to four different officers' messes to have a drink before lunch. When we finally got back to his house I found Peter still there and agreed to do a broadcast for him this afternoon before my evening concerts.

After I had lunched and rested I went back to the hospital because the matron and nursing staff were giving a tea in my honour. I then hurried away with Peter, did a short speech for his recorded programme and another special recorded programme for two stations on the Persian Gulf to which I had not had the time to go, and drove back to the house in time to bathe and change for my first concert which began at eight o'clock. This took place in a large cinema with an excellent stage and first-rate acoustics. George was beaming behind a beautiful concert grand and everything was well organised and efficient to the last degree. The only thing that no one had warned me about was a series of birds' nests cosily ensconced in the roof of the hall. In these nests whole families lived and they were absolutely fascinated by the whole performance. The moment I started to sing they started to sing. At first I thought I'd gone out of my mind, then I grimaced violently off stage at the man who was controlling the microphone thinking that these peculiar sounds must be something to do with that. I rushed off after my first number and asked what was happening;

the man smiled. 'Birds,' he said. 'That's all, just bloody little dicky birds!'

My second concert was at ten and was, if possible, even more successful than the first. The place was packed, the birds seemed surer of the tunes and, tired as I was, I thoroughly enjoyed it all. After this, and a most charming speech from Attwood, we all went back to the mess where a gay party had been organised. It was gay all right and I staggered to bed at about 3.00 A.M.

August 31st

Dragged into consciousness at six and took off at seven, this time in a comfortable Lodestar. An uneventful trip. At Lydda I had a cup of tea with Bill Murray and his wife. He is the station commander and they are both old friends of Jeff's and couldn't be nicer. I was flown to Beirut by a dashing Argentine called Bunting. It was a lovely flight in a luxurious private American plane, an Argus-Fairchild. Bunting had an irreverent sense of humour and we discussed South America and life-in-the-raw and the time passed in a flash.

Tony Lambert met me on arrival. Both the Spears are away until to-morrow, and he very kindly offered to put me up for the night.

Dined with the Navy in the 'Medway II' mess. I was so miserably tired that I didn't enjoy it nearly as much as I should have. I felt guilty too because I knew perfectly well that they would have liked me to sing a few songs

but as I could hardly hold my head up I left at about ten o'clock and went home to bed.

September 1st

Woke feeling fine having at last had a good night's rest. Read the P.M.'s speech from Quebec, a really remarkable speech covering all points with consummate statesmanship.

Mary and Louis returned from Damascus in time to have lunch in the beach hut. I lay about in the sun most of the day and, in the evening, dined with Gyles in Sofar, which is up in the mountains. After dinner we joined Fawwaz Ibn Shaalan, a strange man and certainly a picturesque one. He is in the late thirties, handsome, with the ivory skin of the real Bedouin. He speaks French well but no English. We discussed Lawrence, who was a great friend of his grandfather, Nuri Ibn Shaalan. I said I had known Lawrence during the last few years of his life and it was as though I had suddenly declaimed a magic spell. His aloof, almost expressionless face lit up, his eyes ceased to be sleepy and veiled and became immediately alive. I had certainly uttered a magic spell; Lawrence's name is a potent talisman in this part of the world and will be, I imagine, for many thousand years to come. It was immensely touching to see so clearly, in that moment, how deeply loved he was. Fawwaz Shaalan, with exquisite courtesy, at once invited me to visit his tribe in the desert and I felt bitterly disappointed at having to refuse and explained that I was behind on my schedule already. He

smiled and said that there was always the future when the war was over and I gladly promised.

Fawwaz Ibn Shaalan succeeded to the leadership of the Ruwallah tribe in 1928 when Nuri, his grandfather, settled more or less permanently into city life in Damascus. He is reputed to be somewhat of a 'playboy' and to prefer the pleasures of the cities to the austerities of Bedouin life in the desert. He is also reputed to be intelligent and receptive to European ideas although his typical Bedouin pride occasionally makes his dealings with the mandatory powers a matter of some difficulty. Whether all this is true or not I don't know, but I do know that he is a man of charm and strong personality and someday I shall take him at his word and, sand or no sand, go with him to visit his tribe in the desert.

September 2nd

Nothing of any consequence to report. Rehearsed for a couple of hours with George at the Welfare centre. Tried to master Cole's 'Fresh as a Daisy' but the lyric is non sequitur and dreadfully complicated and I have made it a good deal more so by writing in an extra verse and two extra refrains.

Dined with Hamish Mackenzie and Johnny Schlumberger, who is here on a liaison job. After dinner Hamish and I swam out to the bathing raft. It was pitch dark, the water was gentle and warm and filled with phosphorus, and we lay on the raft, with the waves lapping over us, and gazed up at the incredible stars until we

were quite dizzy. After this we swarm ashore and had some vodka and became dizzier still.

September 3rd

Delysia came to lunch with us to-day accompanied by her fiancé, a distinguished Commandant in the French Navy. She looked perfectly delightful and as young as ever. For two solid years she has been back and forth across the desert, tirelessly and uncomplainingly entertaining the troops, frequently under conditions that would send many temperamental leading ladies into screaming hysterics. She has bounced about in lorries and trucks and been under fire and lost in sandstorms and the net result of it all is that she looks happier and gayer and more vital than I have ever seen her.

I invited her to come with Mary to my concert in the Kit-Kat Club and I was delighted that I did as it gave an added impetus to my performance to feel that she was there. The concert fortunately was a great success, fifteen hundred men crammed into a hall that only held seven hundred and God knows how many more listening to the loud speakers outside. It was blazing hot and I was wet through but it was well worth it.

September 4th

Did a show in a hospital in Sidon. The microphone broke down and so I brushed it grandly aside and bawled like a bull for forty-five minutes. After this I did the wards

and drove back to Beirut in time to do a forty-minute broadcast. This was enlivened by the unexpected arrival of dear Bobby Flemyng, who had popped over from Nazareth where he is in command of a lot of Cypriotes. Humphrey Butler also appeared so I had a friendly audience clustered round me in that hot little room.

September 5th

Bobby came up to Aley to lunch. In the afternoon the R.A.F. sent a plane from Lydda to fetch me. I said my good-byes to Mary and Louis at the house and Jack Carlton saw me off. I was sorry to say good-bye to him as he had really worked so very hard organising my Syrian campaign and had been in the most awful frizz when the microphone let me down.

Arrived at Lydda feeling not very well so asked Bill Murray if I could go to bed for an hour before my concert which was at six. When I woke up I felt like death, took my temperature which was 101 and sent for the M.O. When he arrived I explained that I couldn't possibly not do the concert and that it was also essential for me to do my second one that evening which was at Nathanyia rest camp about two hours away by car. He looked a bit dubious, gave me a benzedrine tablet and said that he would come with me to Nathanyia. Apart from feeling ill I was rather agitated. You never know in these climates what you might have caught! However I bounced on to the stage with a great deal of forced vitality and got through all right and then drove off with the

M.O. to Nathanyia. Here I found several thousand men waiting for me in the open air. They were a little fractious because, owing to us having lost our way, we were late and they had been kept waiting for a half an hour or so. The situation was in no way improved by an idiotic man jumping on to the stage and announcing that I had been detained by the R.A.F. This, I need hardly say, is not the ideal introduction to an entirely Army concert. I started singing with the definite feeling that the whole audience was against me. They were not actively hostile in any way and they stayed quiet, but they just sat there sullenly without giving me any response at all. I have known troop audiences be bloody-minded like this before and there is nothing whatever to be done about it but grit your teeth and persevere and behave as though you thought they were the greatest audience in the world. On this particular evening I determined to get them going if it was the last thing I ever did; I also felt that it was highly possible that it might be. I can only assume that black inward rage has astonishing curative powers for by the time I had got through my first three numbers all fatigue and fever had fled from me. About half way through they began to relax and laugh a bit and from then on I knew the worst was over. By the end they were cheering and applauding as though they really had been the best audience in the world and, flushed with triumph, I went off with the commanding officer and had the strongest and most welcome whisky and soda that ever crossed my lips.

September 6th

Woke hale and hearty with no signs of fever. Spent the afternoon and evening in Haifa with Bobby, who came over in an Army truck. We gossiped and dined and went to rather a scruffy night club. I asked him how he had come by his M.C. and he went off into gales of laughter and said that it had all been the most idiotic mistake. He had, he said, in a moment of aberration during the Italian campaign in Eritrea, suddenly volunteered to drive a train through a tunnel the further mouth of which was covered by an Italian battery. He managed to get through safely and then had to go on doing it for the rest of the day. I asked him if he hadn't been absolutely terrified and he said that of course he had and that the only thing that had got him through was the thought of how Gary Cooper would have done it on the screen! I have seen Bobby Flemyng give delightful comedy performances on the stage but the way he told that story was the most superb exhibition of 'throw-away' technique that he has ever given in his life. He seemed surprised when I told him lightly that that evening was definitely one of the high spots of my whole trip.

September 7th

Lunched with Bill and Eileen Murray and took off in a Lodestar for Cairo at two o'clock. At Heliopolis I was met by Maie Casey, Margaret Gilruth, Penny and Jeff.

Penny presented me with a horrifying itinerary starting with four Canal Zone hospitals to-morrow! At this I struck and he said that he'd re-arrange everything and call me later. Maie and Margaret and I drove out to the house at Mena and had a refreshing swim in the pool. There were a lot of letters and messages waiting for me, among them a telegram from Miles from South Africa suggesting that I go to Nairobi as the troops there are completely isolated and without entertainment. This I can't do much as I should like to as I really haven't the time. I talked to Penny on the telephone and I am taking to-morrow off entirely and spending Thursday, Friday and Saturday in the Canal Zone, finishing up at Suez. It will be strenuous but I think I can make it. Nobody came to dinner fortunately and it was a lovely peaceful evening, just Dick, Maie, Margaret and me. We sat out on the terrace and got ourselves involved in an enjoyable but very rambling argument about the creative impulse as opposed to the executive. It all started by Dick trying to persuade me to do a historical, governmental film on Australia and the Dominions. I explained to him patiently that I could never do things like that to order and he said 'Nonsense' and on we went from there. Maie took my side and Margaret merely looked pensively out over the casuarina trees.

September 8th

Lunched with Jeff at the Mohammed Ali and then we went shopping; we also went to Shephard's where we

ran into Josephine Baker looking really the last word in 'chic' and as bright as a button. She has been out here about nine weeks now having finally got away from Lisbon where she was stuck for months. She is doing a wonderful job for the troops and refuses to appear anywhere where admission is charged or where civilians are present. She says firmly that entertaining the fighting services is her self-appointed war effort and that she has no intention of being side-tracked from it for any reason whatsoever.

Driving home in the car with Dick he told me that I would hear news to my advantage on the radio to-night. I guessed what it was, having already had a previous inkling, although not from him. The surrender of Italy! Another big step nearer the end. After dinner, on the terrace, we discussed the whole war situation. Dick has a shrewd, realistic, clear mind and, above all, a supremely honest one. Once again I reflected how lucky it was that I happened to be in Arras on that certain day in November 1939, the day that I first met him. But for that day I should never have gone to Australia when I did. But for that day I probably shouldn't be here now. It is sometimes quite alarming to consider how little prescience one has of the fateful moments of one's life. On looking back over the years, causes and effects become clear; it is possible to trace back from point to point the combined hazards and circumstances that shaped one's course in a certain direction, but at the time, the original decisive moment, there are no indications, no signs that anything out of the way is happening at all.

My first meeting with Dick was a case in point. I just happened to arrive in Arras on the one day in 1939 when Anthony Eden was passing through with a group of Dominions representatives who were making a tour of the front line. I also just happened to have read in the 'Continental Daily Mail' a few days before a speech by Richard Casey which had impressed me so much that I had cut it out and kept it. It was a taut and virile fighting speech which, coming at a moment when we were sodden with Mr. Chamberlain's interminable and uninspired monologues, felt like a breath of fresh air. I remember asking Anthony, in the frowsy little lounge of the Hôtel de l'Univers, to point Mr. Casey out to me. He did, and, feeling like a film fan with an autograph book, I went straight up to him and told him firmly what I thought of his speech and how delighted I was to have the opportunity of shaking him by the hand. He seemed pleased and that was that, the moment had come and gone.

In May 1940 I happened to sit next to Mrs. Casey at a lunch party in the British Embassy at Washington and she said that her husband was anxious to meet me again and would I lunch or dine the following day. Later on in the same year, after I had been back and forth twice between England and America, Dick Casey suggested that I should make a tour of Australia as the guest of the Commonwealth Government. This I agreed to do, the Ambassador gave his approval, and off I went. This was rather a heavy responsibility for Dick Casey as at that time I was being attacked by certain sections of the Eng-

lish press who, as usual, being both unscrupulous and ill informed, were shrilly yapping up the wrong tree. The Australian visit was fortunately a great success and, after I had made a briefer tour of New Zealand as a guest of the New Zealand Government, I returned to England secure, at any rate, in the knowledge that I had not let down Dick Casey's faith in me. The course of events has changed violently several times since then, both for the world in general and for me personally. It was pleasant driving along the road to Mena with Dick and reflecting that, in the long run, good friends outlive the bitterest enemies.

September 9th

Left at eight-thirty for the Canal Zone. Penny fetched me in a car and we picked up a Brigadier at the Continental. The Brigadier looks like a cross between Admiral 'Nutty' Wells and James Agate, and, like the latter gentleman, has an unbridled passion for imparting irrelevant information. We drove along by the canals; there was a lot of colour and green shade and camels and general water-side atmosphere; Muslim women padded along at the side of the road on bare feet, their dusty black draperies making a sharp contrast against so much vivid light. At some points shiny brown Arab children were flinging themselves in and out of the water and chattering and screaming while their mothers stood nearby washing out a few 'smalls' in the shallows. Penny remained silent but the Brigadier kept up a running commentary.

We arrived at the general hospital at about ten-thirty

and after a forty-five-minute concert for the up patients, I went round the wards with the matron, whose name was Miss Fullerlove. She was quite obviously a darling with a kind, warm personality and a bubbling sense of humour. I talked to hundreds of men and then had lunch and a short rest, after which I went on to another hospital, but I can't be sure which it was as I went to so many. Here I repeated the whole process. This was a desert hospital, mostly under canvas, and I saw some bad cases. I am deeply and forever impressed with the behaviour and courage of our men. Their inherent, deep-rooted good manners make it impossible to pity them. One can privately, very privately, allow oneself a little personal compassion for their broken bodies, but their spirit is clear and high above pity. They contrive, these ordinary, extraordinary men from all over the British Isles, to transcend their sufferings and their surroundings and all the violence and horror that they have endured, with indescribable dignity and grace. They would be the first to mock at the idea of such high-flown qualities being ascribed to them; much of their strength lies in their unquenchable humour, but nevertheless it is there, this age-old human dignity and grace, shining out of them and quite unmistakable, and the fact that they are utterly unaware of it enhances rather than detracts from it. For me, a stranger coming in from the outside, sound of limb, healthy and secure, it was a salutary and humbling experience and one that I never intend to forget until the end of my days. Once having seen all this; once having been brought face to face with one of the strangest para-

doxes of human existence, the spirit of man triumphant in adversity, it will be difficult to tolerate the inevitable anti-climaxes that will come afterwards. It is a sad reflection and, I think, a true one, that this bright light cannot shine permanently. Soon, when the immediate necessity for courage has gone; when the physical sufferings are over, and when the will for actual survival has no longer such urgent demands made upon it, these men will come home. That will be the test, not of them, but of us. The spirit of man may triumph in adversity all right but it is putting the hell of a burden on it to demand that it should also triumph over poverty, injustice, callousness and muddled politics immediately afterwards. I wonder how we shall make out this time?

I didn't finish doing the rounds of the second hospital until seven-thirty which meant that I didn't arrive at the General's house, where I was staying, until nearly nine. The General was a surprise. I can't think why but I had imagined that he would be old and rather stumpy. He was exactly the opposite; youngish, tall and saturnine. He was friendly and easy and I liked him at once. He was also a little deaf which he rose above so well that, like Willie Maugham's slight stammer, it became almost an asset. To look at he reminded me irresistibly of Charles II. We spent a pleasant evening and I went to bed early.

September 10th

Left the house at ten o'clock and arrived at a convalescent depot at eleven where I gave a concert to about two

thousand men in the open air. This took place in an al fresco cinema and was a little trying as there was no roof or shade of any sort. Many men in the audience had had the forethought to put knotted handkerchiefs over their heads. Much as I would have liked to follow suit, I refrained, feeling that perhaps it might detract from the effect of my more sentimental numbers. When I had been grilled to a crisp and the concert was over I had a rub down, a change of clothes and rehearsed with George for an hour. Then, after lunch in the officers' mess—not bad but a bit fly-blown—I rested for an hour and did another concert in the same place. This time, however, they had rigged up a couple of Riviera umbrellas on the stage, one for George and one for me, and it was a bit better. Both concerts went extremely well.

From there I went to another hospital and toured the wards. I talked to several hundred men; all sorts and kinds of cases both surgical and medical. The burn cases were rather horrifying; not only do they look dreadful covered with gentian violet but the smell is sometimes overpowering and, of course, the one thing that one must never do is to appear for a moment to be aware of it. One little man, a very serious case, was sitting up in bed singing happily to himself. A mine had exploded at his feet and both his legs, right up to the top of his thighs, were just charred flesh. All the lower part of him was under a sort of tent; his genital organs, fortunately uninjured, were covered with a piece of lint; apart from this he was stark naked. He showed me his legs with great pride. They had been painted with gentian violet

which had coagulated in places and made the hanging fragments of flesh look like obscene purple grapes. There was a good deal of inevitable suppuration going on underneath and the stink was bad, but I have never seen a man more cheerful. He came from the North country and said that he was doing 'champion' and we discussed Hull and Leeds and Blackpool. I was told afterwards that his legs would heal all right in the long run but that it would take many months. The idea of them ever healing at all seemed to me to be beyond the bounds of possibility.

In the Habbaniyah hospital, which was the most advanced and best equipped that I've seen, they treated burns with saline baths because they said that the gentian violet wasn't always satisfactory and that it had some of the same defects as tannic acid which was discredited early on in the war. I mentioned this to a doctor at the other hospital and he pooh-pooh'd the idea. I wonder which is right? Probably both, depending on the degree of burns and the individual differences of the cases. I am sometimes however a little suspicious of medical enthusiasm for new ideas. I am all for the new ideas but it seems to me that doctors are rather prone to overdo the enthusiasm occasionally. At the beginning of the war I was told that tannic acid was the best and most miraculous treatment for burns that had ever been conceived. A little later gentian violet had usurped first place, and now the saline baths advocates curl their lips at the very mention of gentian violet or tannic acid. I know that these extravagances are perfectly human and denote healthy scientific zeal but, as a layman, it is not un-

naturally a little alarming. I am sure that during the M and B craze last winter it was only rush of work that prevented my own doctor from prescribing it as a cure for my soft corn.

The desert hospitals are really remarkable all things considered. Most of the wards are merely tents and the ingenuity of the hospital staffs is extraordinary. They have thought of so many little ways of making the men as comfortable as possible. There is no doubt that the medical profession in war-time is beyond praise. With the exception of a few rather obtuse officers, a very few, I have seen only gentleness and sympathy and quite staggering efficiency. The nursing sisters all contrive to look as though they had spent at least two hours on their toilettes; their uniforms are always spotless and they all look cool and pleasant. They achieve this in circumstances that would drive ordinary women dotty. The sanitation of course is often primitive, the heat is terrific and the glare and sand and flies are appalling. There is very great human material here. If I had seen nothing else on this trip, these desert hospitals would be worth it all.

September 11th

The General had to make an inspection of a German prison camp at nine o'clock this morning and he took me with him. It was an interesting experience and at the same time irritating. There they were, rows and rows of the much-vaunted representatives of the 'Master Race,' springing to attention with such overdone dis-

cipline that I was surprised they didn't break their necks. I scrutinised their faces carefully as we walked up and down the lines and was fully prepared to find that a large percentage of them were at least fine physical specimens. In this I was wrong. There were very few healthy-looking bodies among the lot of them and their eyes were uniformly repellent.

There are many people in our country still who cherish a sentimental admiration and affection for the German people. They are willing of course to deplore the Nazi mentality, but are inclined to dismiss it as some sort of brutish outside influence that has been forcibly imposed upon a sensitive, cultured and extremely civilised race. They are sometimes even prepared to make excuses for the sadistic bestialities of the young soldiers of the German Army on the grounds that they have been regimented and forced into their wicked ways since they were five years old. All this is perfectly true. They were taken away from their parents when very young and regimented and forced into the belief that hatred, ruthlessness and cruelty were of supreme merit whereas kindness, decency and human sympathy were merely the outward indications of an inner softness and decadence. An entire generation admittedly has been trained to this creed, but what the ardent German sympathisers seem disinclined to tell us is who trained them? The facile answer to that is of course, 'the wicked Nazis,' but who trained the wicked Nazis? There were no wicked Nazis in 1914 nor in 1870 but then of course there were the wicked Prussians. Personally I have little respect or

admiration for a race, however cultured, sensitive and civilised, that willingly allows itself time and time again to be stampeded into the same state of neurotic bestiality and arrogance apparently—if we are to believe the Germanophiles—against its will. If its will is so weak and malleable I can't feel that, as a race, it is much good anyway. I suppose it is hopeless to expect our amiable sentimentalists, sodden with nostalgia for those dear dead summers in Bavaria and the beer gardens of Heidelberg, to face the unpalatable fact that sadistic tendencies and an unregenerate passion for world dominance have been inherent in the German people since the beginning. That they have contributed magnificently to world literature, music and science is undeniable, but that they have also contributed more agony, misery, destruction and despair to modern civilisation than any other race is equally undeniable.

I talked to the commandant of the camp, who told me that the Germans were very uppish and difficult to handle and never stopped complaining of their treatment which, I need hardly say, was far more kindly and lenient than they deserved.

After the prison camp I drove with the General to the desert hospital. Here I gave an hour's concert, toured the wards and had lunch. There was no time for a rest as we had a long drive to Suez where I repeated the whole procedure; however I managed to get a few minutes' sleep in the car.

The drive back to Cairo from Suez along the desert road took just over two hours which was fast going.

There is something very beguiling about the Brigadier. He has attended all of my concerts with unflagging enthusiasm and has said to me regularly after each one, 'Well played, my lord!' We drove into Cairo through a flamboyant sunset and the air felt mercifully cool after the desert.

I arrived at the house, after a farewell drink at the Continental with Penny and the Brigadier, to find Dick and Maie tidied up and ready to leave for Sholto's party to which we had all been invited to meet the King. They left me to have a bath and a drink and come on later. This I did after a restful chat on the terrace with Sir Reginald Dorman-Smith, who was passing through on his way home from India.

Sholto's party was, I thought, on the dreary side, but this jaundiced view may be accounted for by the fact that I had been on the go all day without stopping. We sat in the garden where there was a moving picture screen and watched, with apathy, a couple of bad English propaganda 'shorts' which, I should have thought, would have been enough to persuade the King to hand over the whole of the Nile Delta to the Germans out of sheer irritation. After this we saw the Hollywood version of 'Arsenic and Old Lace' which was interminably long and seemed unable to make up its mind whether to be a roaring farce or a spine-curling thriller. Cary Grant and Raymond Massey, who had been surprisingly injected into it, appeared to be equally undecided, and the total result was unfortunate. I was sitting immediately behind the King and he carried on a running conversa-

tion with me over his shoulder. This prevented me from going to sleep but also, happily, prevented him from seeing much of the film. At 1:30 A.M. I was told that the King was anxious to hear me sing, which proved in him a supreme capacity for taking punishment, and so I seated myself dismally at an upright and very up-standing piano and churned out three or four songs. I don't think I have ever performed so vilely in my life but I was far too weary to care. After this Dick and Maie and I shot off home.

September 12th

Dick was talking to me the other day about doing a tour of South Africa next. I am already half committed to do a tour of Canada but he argues, and I think that he is right, that South Africa is more important to do in the immediate future on account of the number of our wounded that are still there in hospitals all over the Union. General Theron came to lunch to-day and was flatteringly enthusiastic and he and Dick proceeded to send off cables to Field Marshal Smuts and Lord Harlech.

I rested most of the day, swam in the pool and lay in the sun. Jeff came to dinner and I had an argument with Dorman-Smith about Chamberlain which amused Dick very much and passed the time actively and agreeably.

September 13th

Did two concerts, one at the Scottish hospital and the other at the R.A.F. hospital at Abbassia. Both of them rather sticky audiences and hard work. The Abbassia one was in the open air with aeroplanes flying low overhead all the time which didn't make things any easier. I am perfectly convinced that it is a bad thing to have brass hats and matrons in the front rows. It puts a wall between me and the men and makes it twice as difficult to get my points over to them. In the future I am going to insist that there are troops in the front rows, then a wedge of matrons and big shots, and then more troops. I am sure this will make a big difference.

Visited wards in both hospitals. In the Scottish there is a little man whom Margaret took me in to see the other day. He has a broken neck and has been in a plaster cast for months with his head bent back in what appears to be the most agonising position. He was very chipper and was working away at an embroidery frame on a design in coloured wool of his regimental badge. Many of the men do this sort of work, and do it beautifully too. It passes the time and is relaxing to the nerves. Fred Silk, the one with the broken neck, explained that the only real annoyance about being in the plaster cast was that it made it rather difficult to sleep at nights. He sometimes found that the only way he could drop off was by kneeling on the floor in a certain position and resting his head on the bed. He was in the front row at

my concert, so arranged that he could see without straining his eyes upwards. He laughed immoderately throughout, and, as the rest of the audience were not quite as responsive as usual, I played thankfully to him.

In the evening I went with Dick and Maie and Jeff to 'Between Ourselves' which was an E.N.S.A. show with my old friends Hugh French and Norman Hackforth in it. It was exceedingly good, fast-moving and infinitely superior to most of its kind. This particular company has been on the job for two years now, and the strains and stresses of desert travelling seem in no way to have diminished the freshness and vitality of the whole performance. We all went round afterwards and had a drink with them and were photographed inordinately.

September 14th

Did two big concerts at Heliopolis hospitals, both successful, I think largely owing to the re-seating of the audience. I had the men all round me as close as they could get and it all felt much easier and more friendly. When I had finished doing the wards and was enjoying a drink in the officers' mess at about eight o'clock, an anxious young American Lieutenant suddenly burst in with an S.O.S. from Larry Adler. It appeared that the American concert party, Jack Benny, Anna Lee, Larry Adler and Winnie Shaw, were giving a show for several thousand R.A.F. troops in an open-air cinema in Cairo and, at the last minute, Jack Benny and Anna Lee had

been unable to appear, which left only Winnie Shaw and Larry Adler to do the whole show by themselves. The young officer told me that the performance had already started. I gulped down my drink, sent for George, who was about to go home, and rushed into Cairo which was half an hour away. We did it in about twenty minutes which was highly perilous.

Upon arrival at the place I found poor Larry Adler standing on the stage gallantly making jokes, telling stories, playing his mouth organ, in fact doing everything but an adagio dance. A little piece of paper was sent up to him explaining that I had arrived, he read it, and the incredulous relief on his face was beautiful to see. He immediately stopped what he was doing and told the audience that I was there, whereupon there was a lot of cheering and on I went. Flushed with the nobility of my great gesture I sang a few songs very badly, muddled most of my points on account of being oppressed by the size of the audience, bowed and smirked to the flattering but misguided applause and rushed away again because I was supposed to be dining with Alexander Kirk and was already three quarters of an hour late. Whirling back to Mena in the car I reflected gloomily that, as a performer, I depended far too much on advantageous circumstances and that my life on the whole was a thought too convulsive. This dissatisfaction might perhaps be ascribed to fatigue and the fact that I had had too strong a whisky and soda before going on, which always wrecks timing and is anyhow against my moral principles. All the same, whatever the extenu-

ating circumstances, I hadn't been very good and I could only comfort myself with the thought that I at least knew it.

Alexander Kirk held my dinner back for me and we lay afterwards in chaises-longues on the roof and discussed, gently and without heat, the war, foreign policy, the Infinite and ourselves and once more the moon silvered the Pyramids and the stars glittered and grateful peace descended on me. He is a kind man with exquisite manners, and he decorates the varied experiences of his life with both wisdom and wit. The question of Anglo-American relations never once reared its ugly head in the conversation. It seemed, so easily, to be a foregone conclusion.

September 15th

Talked to Norman Hackforth to-day and, if I do go to South Africa, he has offered to come with me and play for me. His contract with E.N.S.A. expires on December the thirty-first. This will be fine as, apart from being a first-rate musician, he has accompanied me so much in the past and knows all my tricks.

September 16th

Took off in Sholto's plane at eleven o'clock for Alexandria with Penny. The trip was brief but fairly rough. We had a pleasant young pilot called Macafee, who flew us over the Italian fleet which had just been brought in in triumph. It was an exciting moment.

In the evening I embarked on a concert that was almost a disaster. It took place in the open-air beer garden of the Fleet Club, the very sight of which was agitating in the first place. There were hundreds of sailors sitting at tables spread out under the trees and there was an atmosphere of boisterous, rather too boisterous, alcoholism. It was, after all, the first time that most of them had been ashore for several weeks; they had just brought home the Italian fleet, and it *was* a beer garden! As I stepped on to the rickety wooden stage my secret voices told me that catastrophe was imminent, and my voices were right. The moment I started to sing my waltz medley the microphone went dead and the sailors at the back immediately began to shout that they couldn't hear. I thought quickly and stopped the medley and went straight into 'Don't Put Your Daughter on the Stage, Mrs. Worthington' for which they stayed reasonably quiet, but the whole set-up prevented them from really hearing or understanding it properly. I then decided to call it a day and sang 'Don't Let's Be Beastly to the Germans' and 'Let's Do It' both of which are pretty sure-fire and finished with the commentary from 'In Which We Serve.' The extra naval chorus for 'Let's Do It' got them all right and they were quiet as mice for the commentary, and I leapt off the stage, sweating with relief, to vociferous cheering.

I was at once surrounded and quickly submerged under a sea of sailors. With the greatest good humour I was shoved, trampled on and battered; I signed pay-books, passes and other scraps of paper until my hand

ached, and I thought at one moment that I should suffocate because it was very hot indeed and very strenuous. When I was at my last gasp I felt a commotion going on in the crowd and saw an enormous stoker fighting his way towards me. With his right hand he was knocking men out of the way while in his left hand he carried a glass of beer without spilling a drop. When he finally got to me he said, 'Here, cock—I thought you might be needing this!' I drank it gladly and shall remember him with affection and gratitude to the end of my days.

After a while a rescue squad appeared and carried me bodily away.

September 17th

Dined with Admiral Sir John Cunningham last night. He has a quick mind and a sly sense of humour and I enjoyed myself thoroughly.

Bathed in the morning with Glynne and then we went with Penny and Mr. and Mrs. Finney to lunch at the Yacht Club. Now the Yacht Club in Alexandria is select and exclusive to an alarming degree although I suspect that the bulk of the members have little or no connection with yachting. There were a number of elderly, mauve-looking ladies sitting on the terrace when we arrived. They were thickly coated with rice powder and were hissing sibilantly. We ordered cocktails and were then immediately asked to leave by the management because we were dressed in shorts and shirts. This

was startling as it seemed to me that our attire was eminently suited both to the climate and the setting. Mr. Finney, a usually influential man, remonstrated in vain and, in order to prevent the whole incident from developing into an unseemly brawl, we swept out with as much dignity as we could muster. This dignity was briefly disrupted by an ardent young man asking me for my autograph. Feeling myself to be on the horns of a dreadful social dilemma I asked the manager if it was contravening the club rules to sign autographs in shorts and if it was should I take them off? But he looked at me stonily and didn't reply.

We had a delicious lunch in the town and comforted ourselves with the reflection that as long as the Alexandria Yacht Club maintained its high moral standards the war for freedom and civilisation really was worth winning.

At four o'clock I gave a concert at a general hospital. After this I had tea with the matron and nurses and did a tour of the wards.

In the evening Glynne and I dined in a sort of restaurant-cum-bar which was full of sailors, soldiers, New Zealanders, Australians, etc., of all ranks. I signed hundreds of pay-books, etc., and everybody stood everybody else drinks. One sailor, it must be admitted, went a little too far and recited 'Macbeth' at the top of his lungs, but nobody minded.

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September 18th

Lunched with Teddy Phillips at the Beau Rivage and settled, entirely successfully, the political, economic and social reconstruction of Europe. He is highly intelligent. I mention this advisedly as his opinions coincide exactly with mine.

Another concert, this time at the general. Teddy came and Lilia and an alluring blonde friend of Teddy's who looked as though she had stepped straight from the Casino at Cannes into the A.T.S. Mrs. Finney came too. They all sat at the back of the hall but I could see them all right and I knew that I had a friendly little bunch of sophisticates appreciating the more worldly allusions in my repertoire.

After I had done the wards, which took a long time as the hospital was very spread out, I had a drink in the officers' mess with the P.M.O. and some of his staff. Two or three of them were inclined to show off, I thought. They were very young service doctors and imagined, misguidedly, that it was impressive to adopt an attitude of amusing callousness when discussing the patients. I think that their intention was to shock me, and if this was so they certainly succeeded, although not quite in the way that they intended. They talked with pseudo-intellectual nonchalance about 'laudable puss,' 'maggot therapy' and the fact that almost any treatment was all right for burns as the patient nearly always died anyway after the first few days from shock. They were

like very young men at a party who, subconsciously aware of their own lack of ease, behave noisily in order to assert themselves. I think it only fair to say that I haven't encountered this devil-may-care attitude in the medical profession often. I let them go on for a little while and then explained to them gently that, whereas I was unshockable by physical horrors, I was grievously susceptible to psychological affectations. I went on to say that in my opinion, which was in no way unique, the first essential in good doctors was individual sympathy for and understanding of each patient, and that the moment they began to regard their patients as mere cases they were liable to do more harm than good. This damped them somewhat and from then on the conversation was less roguishly macabre. I think on the whole that these vast urban hospitals suffer by comparison with the smaller desert ones in that they are cluttered up with too much routine and tend to become casual.

September 19th

Went with Lilia before lunch to have a cocktail with Prince and Princess Paul of Greece in their beach hut and then met Glynne and Arnold at the Beau Rivage where we ate some peculiar but fortunately unlethal shrimps.

Glynne, Arnold, Penny and I caught the evening train back to Cairo. It was a rowdy little journey on account of Penny having been given a bottle of genuine, pre-war bonafide Black and White! Although accustomed to do-

ing this trip in the most special of special cars, we quite enjoyed slumming it in the ordinary pullman.

September 20th

Shopped in the morning and lunched with Dick and Maie in the flat. They have just had a letter from Dickie saying that he is arriving on the twenty-sixth so I shall just miss him which is most annoying.

Maie and I drove back to Mena in the afternoon and I worked on my farewell broadcast for to-morrow evening.

Drove in again at six-thirty and I gave a concert to the entire staff of the Minister of State's office. Although it was in the open air it went well and the 'mike' was good.

Went on to an uproarious little party given by Glynne and Arnold in the latter's flat. The gayer, younger social set of Cairo were shinningly represented; among them there appeared, like an amiable cyclone, an immense young New Zealander called Sandy Thomas. Jeff and I got him into a corner and he told us, lucidly and with brilliant economy of words, a fantastic story. He is obviously a lion-hearted young man. This became more and more apparent as he so persistently deprecated his own exploits.

At about two in the morning I was driven home to Mena in Sandy Thomas's truck. The driver was a New Zealand sergeant who had been through a considerable

number of major desert battles. As we drew near to the private road to the Caseys' house I made him stop the truck for a minute while I delivered a stern warning. Dick, being Minister of State, is closely guarded which is just as it should be. What isn't quite as it should be however is the fact that he is guarded by a battalion of Gurkhas who suffer from excess of zeal, overenthusiastic obedience to orders and have mad eyes. These sentries have frequently been known to fly at Dick himself and pin him into the car with their bayonets until he remembered the right password. Many house guests, I believe, have been severely wounded even in daylight. Up to date I had escaped annihilation through shrieking the password whenever I entered the gate and cringing submissively. One look at the New Zealand sergeant however, plus the knowledge of his war record, convinced me that he was not the cringing type, so I made him promise on his word of honour to stop the truck dead the moment we were challenged. He laughed tolerantly and on we went. We were challenged all right and he didn't stop quite dead enough, whereupon those maniacal Gurkhas were on the footboards in a flash and shoving their rifles practically down our throats. I screamed the password and wrung my hands like Queen Phillipa and the burghers of Calais and finally, when a corporal had been sent for, we were allowed through, but it was a narrow shave. I bade an affectionate good-bye to the sergeant at the front door and warned him again to be dreadfully careful on the way out. It would be such a miserable anti-climax to have come through all those

desert campaigns unscathed only to be disembowelled in the Minister of State's garden in Cairo!

September 21st

Spent the morning planning my complicated packing problems.

In the evening Penny fetched me and drove me into Cairo to do my broadcast. There had been a good deal of muddling but we finally managed to get everything straightened out and the broadcast went off all right, although I had to keep my eye on the clock all the while I was singing in case I went a fraction of a second over my allotted time. I finished with my farewell speech to the troops and hospitals I had visited in the Middle East. I think it was good; anyhow it came from the heart.

At six-thirty General Theron fetched me from the broadcasting place and we drove out to Mena where he and Penny had a drink on the terrace while I changed, after which we set off in the car again to drive eighty miles into the desert. We were bound for Khatatba camp where I was to face my first South African audience. I felt tired and nervous and convinced that at least ninety per cent of them would never have heard of me. General Theron, young-looking with light hair and piercing blue eyes, did his best to reassure me by explaining that all South Africa knew my music and had read my plays and 'Present Indicative' but I remained sceptical, realising that although they might know and even be devoted to my music, they hadn't yet had the peculiar experience of

hearing me sing it. He painted glowing pictures of the Union as we bumped along over the interminable desert road and assured me that I should have a terrific reception when I go there in January. (Incidentally a cable had arrived a few days ago from Field Marshal Smuts inviting me most warmly as a guest of the South African Government, and so everything was more or less settled.) This of course made me more nervous than ever; I had a dreadful feeling that to-night was a sort of trial audition.

We arrived at camp at nine o'clock and there, sitting on their hunkers in the sand facing a small, brilliantly lit wooden stage, was what seemed to me to be the entire South African Army. On the stage was a small band and a pretty young E.N.S.A. artiste who was singing beautifully, far too beautifully, I thought, and my heart sank still lower. We were met by General Evered Poole and several other officers and Penny led me miserably to the wooden steps leading to the back of the stage. I felt like Sidney Carton mounting the steps of the guillotine, but I dismally lacked the comforting reflection that I was about to do a far, far better thing than I had ever done. The E.N.S.A. artiste (whose name I am ashamed to say I never knew) ended her programme to well-deserved and tumultuous applause. I am eternally grateful to her for keeping that enormous audience so charmed and happy. There was an anguished pause during which Penny rushed on to the stage to fix the microphone and George appeared like magic from the outer darkness and sat himself with infuriating composure at the piano,

then up came the lights again and I walked on to one of the most wonderful receptions I have ever had in my life. It went on for so long that I even had time to register what a fantastic spectacle it was. That vast concourse of khaki-clad men, row after row of them, sitting in a sort of amphitheatre scooped out of the sand; there was a bright moon and the sky was luminous and I could see, an incredible distance away, the heads of the men standing high up at the back silhouetted against it.

I hadn't been singing for more than a minute before I realised that everything was going to be all right. Actually it was a great deal more than all right; they were an extraordinary audience, quick and attentive and most generous. I sincerely believe that they contributed as much, if not more, to that performance as I did. They made me feel that I was good and so consequently I was, as good as I could be, and when the whole show was over and I had wished them well in Afrikaans (a phrase hurriedly learned from Frank Theron on the way out in the car) I discovered that I had been on the stage without a break for nearly an hour and a half. It was one of the happiest and most enjoyable performances that I have ever given and I can only say that if the audiences in South Africa are a quarter as kind as that collection of tough soldiers I can't wait to get there.

I know of few pleasures in life that can equal that glorious moment when a show has been successful and is mercifully over; the nervous misery endured beforehand, the anxiety and strain, all disappear and are as though they had never been. The only sensation comparable

to it is the sudden alleviation of physical pain by a strong drug. Laymen may consider this to be an exaggeration but any actor will agree with me, it is a peculiar happiness compounded of immense gratification, confidence reborn and indescribable relief.

Warmly enveloped in this mantle of personal satisfaction I was led blissfully through the sand to the officers' mess tent where we drank and dined and told stories until after midnight. Before leaving I was invited to the sergeants' mess to have a last glass of beer and we finally got ourselves into the car at about one-thirty in the morning. The moon was on the rim of the horizon as we drove home and the desert seemed to have a bloom on it like peach. We stopped once or twice for obvious reasons and when we turned our backs on the car (out of common politeness) and looked away over that illimitable, empty land, it was as though there was no world anywhere any more, nothing but an eternity of sand and stars.

September 22nd

My last day in the Middle East. In the morning I went to call on General Moorhead and General Linsell. Colonel Murray escorted me. He was amiable but a trifle dour and had rather an uncooked look as though he hadn't been left long enough in the oven. Moorhead and Linsell were charming and we discussed, I'm afraid, Basil Dean and E.N.S.A. A conversation over which I intend to draw the thickest veil.

The Caseys gave a farewell cocktail party for me in

the flat in Cairo. All my friends came and it was a great success. After it we drove back to Mena and dined quietly. Dick, Maie, Margaret, Jeff and me. It was peaceful and a little sad, for me at any rate, because I hate saying good-byes and I leave at crack of dawn to-morrow before any of them will be awake.

September 23rd

Called at five o'clock and finished my last-minute packing. Penny, Arnold and Glynne fetched me in a car at six o'clock. Margaret touchingly appeared in a dressing gown to wave me away. Arnold and Glynne hadn't been to bed at all having decided, with disastrous results, to sit up all night gambling at the Mohammed Ali Club. Dear Arnold was in that mood of gay dottiness that usually follows such carryings on. The car broke down hopelessly at the entrance to the drive and a mild panic set in; however we flagged a passing lorry driven by an R.A.F. corporal, piled into it bag and baggage and whirled off to the airport. Here, I need hardly say, we were told that the plane wouldn't leave until eight, and so we relaxed and had several cups of tea and made light-hearted conversation. I felt forlorn at the thought of leaving Penny. I knew I had only a few more days of intensive work to do in Tripoli but I also knew how much I should miss his brisk organisation of everything from the microphone to the piece of spare soap wrapped up in paper. He had been so unfailingly helpful and kind and, above all, ever ready to laugh at the right moments. When I finally

stepped into the plane he waved and said, 'All the best,' and turned away and I was aware that I was leaving an old friend.

We came down at El Adem at about noon. I was received by a boisterous and very pleasant station commander who gave me some tea and an ash-tray made out of one of the 'Knightsbridge' shell cases. I visited the camp hospital where there were only a very few patients and no one seriously ill, and then got back into the plane which, as usual, was like a furnace. Having resettled myself to my satisfaction on some mail bags, the pilot told us that there was something wrong and that there would be an hour or so's delay. The hour or so turned into nearly four hours during which I visited the troops during their lunch hour and signed hundreds of autographs and talked to various groups of them. They all looked healthy and well but were naturally pining for any sort of news of home.

El Adem is a stark, dreary place and what there is of it has been repeatedly bombed by us, the Germans and the Italians. The heat was violent; on some of the broken walls of half-demolished buildings there were still scrawled in thick paint German and Italian signs and notices. In the officers' mess I had a not very alluring lunch but in very good company. In course of it my pilot, Adler, and several others told me horrible and obviously quite authentic stories of German and Italian 'booby traps.' These are definitely one of the nastier features of modern warfare. Our enemy's favourite trick was to mine a lot of equipment that they had left behind, including hospital

dressings. The most dreadful of all was that they fixed mines onto wounded men so that when our chaps came to pick them up they were all blown to pieces. The wounded men who were conscious and aware of what was happening were efficiently gagged so that they were unable to warn their rescuers. All this was told me by men who had actually seen it and so there was no 'German atrocity propaganda' nonsense about it. I should think, on the whole, that this is about as low as human nature has sunk up to date. One thing is crystal clear to me and that is that, however savagely trained our soldiers may be in commando tactics, street fighting or bayonet attacks, they would never in any circumstances be capable of such cold-blooded devilishness. War can, and very often does, bestialise men in the heat of the moment, but I know, beyond any doubt, that no British soldier would callously mine a defenceless wounded man. I wonder how soon it will be before these macabre, sub-human crimes will be glossed over and forgotten, and for what reasons?

We finally took off and, after a long and tiring flight, arrived at Tripoli at six-thirty (their time). I was met by an amiable young Captain called Hunnybun who drove George and me into the town, a distance of about twenty miles. He delivered a kindly welcoming message from the General inviting me either to stay with him at his mess or go to the hotel. I felt that I wanted to be alone, so I chose the hotel. On arrival we called upon a taciturn Colonel who, though polite, seemed to be rather off hand about the whole business. He said, casually, that

nothing in the way of an itinerary had been prepared for me at all. I smiled wearily and made a mental note to deal with the situation in the morning when I had had a good night's rest.

George was whisked off to a hostel somewhere and I returned to the Del Mahari Hotel to dine with Hunnybun, a Colonel Owen and a Major Mangles. There was a scarcity of everything and so we had very little to eat; however Colonel Owen produced a bottle of Canadian whisky which we drank out of the broken-off bottoms of beer bottles as there was no crockery or glass either. It was a strange sensation enjoying these primitive delights in what had once been such a very luxurious hotel. It has functioned steadily through the Italian and German occupations, and is now functioning, a trifle less steadily, through ours. A three-piece orchestra was squeaking away at the end of the courtyard; a fountain burbled convulsively in the centre. Everything was dark on account of lighting restrictions and the whole atmosphere was very peculiar indeed. The hotel having been requisitioned for the services and distinguished visitors (sic) there were a higher number of A.T.S. and W.A.A.F.S. about. Their shrill laughter came suddenly and surprisingly through the darkness. I think that they must have been enjoying themselves immensely. At a given moment the band played 'Lily Marlene.' This was received with tremendous applause and had to be repeated over and over again. Everyone joined in and sang it loudly with a nightmarish effect in that mysterious, echoing place. After this the band packed up and some keen amateur musicians took

charge of the piano. This was really too much for me and so I said good night and went to bed. My room was small but quite comfortable and it had the inestimable advantage of a minute bathroom attached. This unfortunately smelt strongly of fish. I stuffed 'Quies' into my ears in order to shut out the distant strains of 'White Christmas' and went immediately into a deep sleep.

September 24th

Was called at seven-thirty with a mug of tea and two thick meat sandwiches! This was a not entirely pleasant surprise. I shaved and bathed in the aquarium and dressed at my leisure and at nine o'clock went off to deal with the redoubtable Colonel whom the dawn of a new day had rendered slightly more amiable. There were also present a Major Rasin (Welfare) and an R.A.F. officer. I rapped out a few brisk suggestions and finally managed to get an itinerary set for the three days that I am to stay here. After all arrangements had been made and a microphone and piano located, I set off in a truck to drive to the combined general hospital. Here I was unable to give a concert as the piano, although located, had not been 'laid on.' However I made a tour of the wards; not very bad cases, mostly medical.

After a horrid lunch at the hotel I went off to a general hospital. Here everyone was welcoming and I did a concert; the audience was dullish but attentive and, at the end, most appreciative. I made an even more extensive tour of the wards than usual because the hospital

was full and there were a lot of bad battle casualties, mostly from Salerno. For the first time in all the hospitals I have visited I felt a sudden uprush of emotion that nearly choked me; fortunately I was able to control this and I am sure that nobody suspected it; perhaps I was overtired, perhaps there was a special urgency in the air because most of them had been very recently wounded and were trying, so gallantly, to orientate themselves to their new surroundings and the surprising experience of physical pain. There wasn't one of them of course who didn't smile and say that he was doing fine, but I knew that for some of them this gesture, this extra flicker of unconquerable spirit, must have been a prodigious effort and I felt ashamed that the mere fact of my presence should make such demands on them. Perhaps however it wasn't bad for them; perhaps after all the fact of having to make the effort might have cheered them a bit. I most profoundly hope so. There was one who had, this morning, had an operation. He was still virtually unconscious and was having a blood transfusion; his eyes were closed and he was the colour of wax so I didn't disturb him and passed on. About an hour later when I was in another ward a sister came with a message that he was asking to see me. I went back at once. He was of course terribly weak and could hardly speak but I held his hand and talked to him and told him how much better he would be feeling in a few hours after his 'cocktail.' He smiled at this and said that he was feeling better already. As a matter of fact he will recover eventually but it will take a long time.

Dined with the General. His A.D.C. came to fetch me at the hotel and turned out to be William Taylour, Rosie Headfort's [The Marchioness of Headfort] son. There were four others present at dinner and it was a pleasant evening. The General was delightful and I genuinely regretted that I had not accepted his invitation to stay in the mess.

September 25th

Started off at nine-thirty and drove out to a New Zealand hospital. This was not entirely successful owing to a lash-up in the organisation. To begin with the hospital staff were under orders to pack up and go and were evacuating their patients as fast as they could. In these circumstances it would obviously have been much wiser if the authorities had postponed my visit, but still they hadn't, and there I was, so I gave a concert to about five hundred up patients (hardly any of them New Zealanders) in the open air with the sun blazing down on them and me and flies climbing up my nose, in my ears and, occasionally, into my mouth while I was singing. They were quite a good audience but it was hard work. After this I was given a glass of water by the matron, who was palpably harassed and, I suspect, secretly irritated at having to waste time with me on such a busy morning. A doctor took me to see the few bed patients that were left in the tents; these were malaria and jaundice cases, all the battle casualties having been evacuated. I got through this quickly and arrived back at the hotel in time to have a little rest before lunch.

At three in the afternoon I gave a concert at the general hospital for about seven hundred and fifty men. When it was over and while I was changing into a dry shirt Peter Daubeney appeared. I was delighted to see him and it took me a moment or two to realise that something was wrong; I then noticed an empty sleeve hanging and realised that he had lost his left arm. He told me, cheerfully, that it had been amputated only a week before and this was his first day up! He was high and a bit overexcited but his eyes betrayed a lot of suffering, poor boy; however his recovery, owing to the new penicillin treatment, has been fantastically quick. When I had done the wards, which took a couple of hours, I went back to his ward and talked to him and Bill Gore-Langton, a brother officer of his, who was in the next bed and had lost his right arm at the same time, in Salerno. Bill's case is a little more serious than Peter's because his arm was amputated at the shoulder. They were both in the best of spirits and an orderly appeared with some cold beer and we had quite a party.

Dined at the hotel with Michael Gold, a dinner party of eight people. Finished the evening with Ian Spence, whom I like enormously; we had a hilarious heart-to-heart talk aided and abetted by rather warm Canadian whisky in tooth mugs.

September 26th

The day started in a haze of muddle and cross purposes. I had previously told the Colonel that I had to be

in Gibraltar by to-morrow night and he, having discovered that there was no through plane to-morrow morning and that I should have to leave this afternoon, had cancelled both my to-day's hospitals without telling me. I know that he did this with the best intentions in the world but I was very irritated indeed and went round to his office and explained firmly that I *never* cancelled engagements unless I was too ill to appear and that everything must be laid on again immediately. After some hectic telephoning this was done and off I went to a South African hospital which was fine; an excellent audience and a nice friendly atmosphere. I know I am going to like South Africa. There was a mixed lot in this particular hospital, among them about a hundred Americans in from Salerno. I talked to some tough men from Texas and Arizona; they were magnificent specimens and in great heart but I was less impressed by some of the mournful little Brooklyn boys lying there in tears amidst the alien corn with nothing worse than a bullet wound in the leg or a fractured arm.

After lunch I did the R.A.F. hospital which took me until six o'clock and so I had time to pop along to the other hospital to call on Peter and Bill again. We had some more beer and talked for over an hour. Bill has good looks and great vitality. He has obviously had a hell of a time and is still in constant pain but rises above it admirably. He told me that he was conscious when they took off his arm because he had administered chloroform to himself and sniffed it too hard and too close. It must have been excruciating agony. It was heartening

talking to these two boys, both of them a million per cent English, both of them Guards officers and both so utterly different from each other and so unmistakable in type. Peter, frail, with fine manners and rather exaggerated emphasis on words; Bill, brown and husky with a perfect Eton-cum-Guards club phraseology. When I asked him about the pain he said that it was pretty bloody about every quarter of an hour and reminded him of his prep school when a bigger boy twisted his arm behind his back and made him blub! Between them they created an atmosphere of well-bred, privileged England at its best; I had a mental picture of sycamores, tennis-courts, green lawns and rather yellowing white flannels. 'Stands the church clock at ten to three and is there honey still for tea?' They spoke of the men who served under them with such deep affection and understanding and described how magnificently they had behaved. Their own exploits and personal suffering they understated and dismissed. We are a strange race indeed and the much maligned 'Old School Tie' is as essential a part of our heritage as anything else. In time of war it proves itself again to be one of our greatest national assets and one of our deepest prides.

Had a farewell drink with the General and then dined with Ian and went to bed early.

September 27th

There is a certain air of pathos about the town of Tripoli; the foolish pathos of an expensive tart who has

allowed herself to go to seed and forgotten to do her nails. The city is well laid out. There are gardens and terraces and grandiose buildings but it all has the impermanence of some overmodern World's Fair exhibit. The coloured plaster is already peeling from the angular, self-conscious architecture and the streets are dusty and woebegone. The whole place was obviously never intended to withstand bombardment and conquest. There could never have been, either in its conception or its achievement, any real spirit. Whatever pretentious pride it ever had wilted immediately in adversity: like the Italian Army it could only have been impressive in peace and fair weather. Now, with truckloads of bronzed, tough British and American soldiers whooping up and down its once immaculate boulevards, it seemed cringing and submissive and utterly lacking in even the dignity of decay.

I spent two hours on the beach in the sun. I swam lazily out to the bathing raft and contemplated the sea and the sky and the depressing fact that this was the last really hot weather I should enjoy for a long time. Ian joined me for an early lunch and we ate Spam sandwiches and doughnuts and drank sweet lemonade on the terrace of the officers' beach club, rather than face the horrors of the hotel table d'hôte.

I took off at two o'clock in a DC-3 and endured four hours of considerable discomfort as it was rough and bumpy and several of my fellow passengers were bright green and sick. Oddly enough I didn't feel a qualm which must prove that I am achieving immunity. After a terrifying swoop through the Atlas Mountains through an

electric storm, we landed at Algiers. It was bitterly cold and pouring with rain and I felt shaken and bad-tempered. My tour, in so far as work was concerned, was over. I had bidden a sad good-bye to George at Tripoli and presented him with a wrist watch as a token of my esteem and very sincere gratitude for all he had done. Never in all the weeks he had played for me, in all the differences of climate and all the difficult circumstances, had he once complained or even looked disconcerted. He had always been there when I wanted him and faded away with the most unobtrusive tact when I didn't. Now I was alone again, on my way home, and the adventure was nearly over. I had a dreary feeling of anti-climax which the rain and cold did little to mitigate. There was no car to meet me. I rang up naval headquarters and discovered that Joe Vian, with whom I had hoped to stay the night, had left several weeks ago. The Navy had kindly reserved a room for me at the Aletti Hotel and offered to send a car out to fetch me, but by this time an E.N.S.A. car had arrived, and so I drove into the town in that accompanied by Tony Mattei, who had happened to be on the plane with me, and a Major Fairfax who was the E.N.S.A. representative in Algiers. He was extremely courteous and nice and I was most grateful to him.

The Aletti Hotel, which had been requisitioned by the U.S. Army, received me amiably but without hysterical enthusiasm. I was given a room and bath in which I found a pile of dirty washing belonging to the previous occupant. I immediately telephoned to Humfrey, who

chided me bitterly for putting my faith in the Navy and not coming to stay with him and then, in the face of my tearful protestations, invited me to a gala performance at the opera of the Royal Artillery Band. I had a quick dinner in the hotel restaurant with Oliver Baldwin, who suddenly appeared and asked me to join him at his table, and went off to the opera. It really was rather a peculiar performance. The R.A. Band played well but the high-voiced, twittering French social audience seemed a trifle bewildered by the whole thing. I sat in a box, inadequately dressed in khaki slacks and a shirt, with a clutch of eminent Generals in full regalia. General Giraud was sitting two boxes away and, in the entr'acte, Humfrey introduced me to him. We conversed politely for a few minutes. He looked like a 'Pears Annual' coloured plate of a French General. His moustache was slightly frayed at the ends and lay on his cheeks uneasily. I thought he seemed rather gloomy and depressed and ascribed it to the Gilbert and Sullivan Fantasia which had just come to a timely end, but Humfrey told me afterwards that he had had another set-to with De Gaulle and was becoming more and more aware of the writing on the wall.

The Royal Artillery Band was certainly catholic in its choice of music. It left no stone unturned from Brahms and Debussy to Sousa. The best item was really Dick's [Richard Addinsell] 'Warsaw Concerto.' This fairly tore the place up. I endured an embarrassing autograph mobbing in the foyer afterwards, a number of high-breasted, rather Jewish-looking French jeunes filles attacked me shrilly with cries of 'Voilà le fameux capitaine

anglais.' After I had signed their programmes and said how 'charmé' and 'ravi' I was that they had liked 'In Which We Serve,' I drove back with Humfrey to the mess and had a glass of beer before returning home to bed.

September 28th

However sybaritic and opulent this hotel may have been before the war, it is plain living and high thinking now all right. After an unsuccessful effort to get a cup of coffee in my room I came down to the mess and had breakfast. Adolph Menjou surprisingly appeared and sat at my table. He was in uniform and wearing a beret and he is taking the war in a big way. He is running a concert party and telling the troops anecdotes about the favourite stars in Hollywood. I must say I think it was very clever of him to have thought of this; I know of nobody better equipped to do it; he has lived there for years, knows everyone and has charm and a strong personality. He talked to me, a trifle hysterically, I thought, about the dire problem of coloured American troops in England, and gloomily envisaged a future race of 'high yellows' all over our island from Kettering to Loch Lomond. I fear that I took these dismal prognostications rather flip-pantly and said that at least the injection of a little coloured blood into our stock would ensure us having better teeth.

Bill Deely fetched me in a car and, after a lot of fussing about with papers as I was travelling in a civilian plane for the first time since I had left England, we drove out

to Maison Blanche. The whole airport was a shambles owing to there having been a terrific storm which had prevented any planes taking off for twelve hours. There were all sorts and kinds of nationalities milling about in the mud; Americans, British, French, Norwegians and even two captured German officers under escort. There were also several E.N.S.A. artistes with tired faces and bright hair who managed to impart a certain 'Crew-station-on-a-Sunday-morning' atmosphere to the scene. Eventually, after a lot of waiting about and autograph signing and a series of conversations with friendly Americans who had met me before in Pittsburgh or Panama or somewhere, I took off in a battered DC-3 which had just been through the storm and smelt of sick. The flight was uneventful but beautiful, for the weather had cleared. I sat up in front with the pilot (a most engaging tough from Indiana) who turned on the radio and we listened to Judy Garland, far away in California, crooning faintly through waves of violent 'static.' The Mediterranean was calm and brightly coloured and we flew up the middle with Europe on our right and Africa on our left; it was so clear that Gibraltar became visible 140 miles away. As we drew nearer we flew over a light cruiser steaming along and my heart leapt for I recognised her. She was heading for the harbour and going at a good speed so I gathered that she would be there almost as soon as we were. The Rock looked dramatic set in the royal blue sea with the mountains of Spain in the background.

John met me and told me that Mason-Mac was away and that Tony was on leave in England and so, with the

exception of a few transients, we had Government House to ourselves. I was sad to think I shouldn't see the dear Excellency but reflected that a few days of utter relaxation wouldn't do me any harm at all as I was feeling tired and was starting a cold, the inevitable result of the sudden change of climate between Tripoli and Algiers.

About an hour after I had arrived we drove down to the harbour and went on board 'my ship.' They gave me a wonderful welcome and told me that I had been nearly, but not quite, ousted from the first place in their 'distinguished guest' affections by General Eisenhower, who had spent a few days on board when they were patrolling the Italian coast. I immediately gave the requisite display of insensate jealousy and permitted myself to be soothed by pink gin. There is just a chance that they may be able to take me home with them but I fear it is a remote one.

September 29th

Went on board again in the forenoon; visited the W.O.s' mess, gossiped in the wardroom and talked to the Captain and the Commander. The blow has fallen and they definitely will not be able to take me home.

Robert Eddison appeared at Government House in the afternoon and invited John and me to go on board his ship this evening. He looks extremely well and is now a Lieutenant R.N.V.R. It was hard to imagine that this trim young officer had so brilliantly played the farouche 'Roland Maule' in 'Present Laughter' when we were rehearsing it just before the war.

After dinner we went on board as bidden; it was an enormous ship and the wardroom was crowded and gay and it was only John's iron sense of duty that got us home before curfew.

September 30th

Visited Oswald Horne in the general military hospital. He had just been operated on for appendicitis. He seemed very weak and I think he must have had a bad time. After this I dined with Admiral Burrough, who has succeeded Admiral Collins at the Mount. To my surprise and pleasure Joe Vian was there. He is passing through. We squabbled amiably all through dinner and a good time, I hope, was had by all.

October 1st

The new Russian Ambassador is here for the day and is flying to England to-night. He seems a pleasant man but his English is limited. Joe Vian came at teatime to fetch me to go shopping. Joe, in common with many other Englishmen, labours under the delusion that the only way to make a foreigner understand your language is to shout very loudly in his ear. He fixed the wretched Ambassador with a sharp blue eye and said, 'Rain in Russia?' with the utmost sternness. The Ambassador looked startled and made a small, unintelligible sound, whereupon Joe repeated even more threateningly, 'RAIN IN RUSSIA?' The Ambassador hurriedly nodded and backed away and the conversation closed.

Went to have a drink with a Colonel in a house half

way up the Rock overlooking the town and the harbour. We sat on a terrace listening to the noises of the town drifting up from below and watching the sunset. It was a lovely evening and the colour and light were indescribable. I could see the ship I have spoken of so lovingly in this diary putting to sea. I thought gratefully and affectionately of all my friends on board, and watched her sail, smoothly and with immense dignity, out over the darkening water. That was the last time I saw her or ever shall see her. She was H.M.S. 'Charybdis' and she was sunk in action off the coast of France in the early hours of the morning on October 23rd. There were very few survivors.

October 2nd

Drove with John to Algeciras and lunched with the Spanish Consul. He was an agreeable man and most hospitable.

I got back to Gibraltar in time to rehearse for my broadcast to-morrow night and then dined with John, Bobby Mayhew and the Boffin after which we finished up on board their M.L., a neat and efficient little ship that goes popping off on patrol with pugnacious gallantry.

October 3rd

Great excitement on account of Dickie arriving in a royal plane with the leading members of his staff en route to take up his new appointment in the Far East. I went

up to the Mount to talk to him while he was having his bath. He was in cracking spirits and, as usual, bursting with energy. We had a hurried Royal Naval Film Corporation conference with Admiral Burrough dealing with technical matters affecting Gibraltar as opposed to the home shore establishments. After this we went down to the airport. Dickie took off at eleven o'clock. It was raining slightly and the visibility wasn't very good and the plane soon disappeared into the mist.

Did my broadcast in the evening and then dined with Pat Donelly and four signals officers. A political argument blew up towards the end of dinner and I listened, with some despondency, to the ill-informed opinions expressed. I become more and more alarmed at what appears to be our utter inability to learn from experience. One Colonel who had been giving a spirited defence of 'Munich' and all it entailed, finished up a trifle irrelevantly, I thought, by saying that in his opinion the whole country should have been conscripted fifty years ago! I asked him gently if he meant for the Boer War and he hammered the table with his fist and said, 'Yes!' He didn't add 'By Gad, sir' but I really think he should have.

October 4th

Went to see poor Oswald Horne again. He is now very ill indeed with peritonitis and on the danger list. I do hope he will pull through all right. He talked to me weakly and said he felt 'pretty grim.'

Had a drink with the Admiral. It has still not been

decided which of H.M.'s ships is to have the tawdry privilege of taking me home.

October 5th

'Flags' (Derek Stanley-Smith) arrived to tell me that all is fixed and that I am to sail this evening. At noon I went in the Admiral's barge to call on the Captain. He was friendly and welcoming and so was the Commander whom I knew years ago in the 'Vernon' with Charles Lambe. I am to have the Captain's suite which is large and comfortable.

Mason-Mac arrived back from Italy an hour or so before I was due to leave. It was fine timing as I should have hated to go without getting a glimpse of him. He was in good spirits and full of stories of the Italian campaign and Badoglio and King Victor Emmanuel.

Went up to say good-bye to the Admiral with real regret; he is quite one of the nicest men I have ever met.

Arrived on board at seven o'clock. I had a drink in the wardroom which is vast, after which I dined alone in the Captain's cabin and was then led up to the bridge, a hazardous journey in the pitch dark, clambering over obstructions on the deck. The ship had cleared the harbour by a few miles and we were standing off waiting for some other ships and our escort. Far away on the horizon the city of Tangier sent a glow into the night sky and, far astern, the lights of Gibraltar and Algeciras were twinkling. The night was clear and very still.

October 6th

Slept beautifully and worked a little in the morning on notes for a broadcast that I intend to do when I get back to London. Went up on to the bridge. The whole picture was like a highly coloured supplement from a weekly magazine. The sea was a shining blue and the other ships of the party churning along made bow waves and wakes of dazzling white.

The ship is big and it would take weeks really to learn one's way about. The Captain couldn't be nicer and is very talkative and absolutely over the moon with pleasure at having this command. He has spent most of his life in submarines. He has a youngish face, grey hair and an excellent speaking voice. The wardroom is too large and crowded really and although everyone is amiable they mostly belong to their own special 'cliques' and there is none of that immediate, warm intimacy of smaller ships.

The big shock came just after dinner when the Captain announced over the ship's radio that we had had orders to turn back to Gibraltar! Of course the whole ship's company was bitterly disappointed, including me. They had all bought bananas and lemons and bottles of sherry to take home to their wives, and they had all been at sea a long time and were looking forward so eagerly to a little leave. They took the bad tidings magnificently and made a lot of rueful jokes about it. I felt dreadfully sorry for them.

October 7th

Woke early with the ship cracking along at twenty-four knots and everything vibrating like mad. I borrowed a typewriter from the Captain's secretary and tried to work on my broadcast, but it wasn't very successful.

We arrived back at Gibraltar in a light rain storm and a haze of anti-climax at about four-thirty. I went ashore immediately and Tony tried to get me a seat on the plane to-night but there was no room. However the A.O.C. has promised to get me on to-morrow night.

At six o'clock H.E. gave an hour's lecture to all the officers on the Rock about his mission with Badoglio and the general political situation in Italy. He did it well and it was extremely interesting.

October 8th

In a way my anti-climactic return was rather fortunate because this morning a large envelope arrived from Lorn full of personal and business letters and news. It was dated weeks ago so I can only imagine that the official censors have been having the whale of a time. She also enclosed a lot of press cuttings and letters referring to the broadcast I did the night before I sailed. I read them through with astonishment. A number of them were just plain abusive; the rest were bewildered and proved that their writers had obviously missed the point of the 'Germans' song entirely. Lorn said in her own letter that there

were several hundred enthusiastic ones waiting for me at home and that she had sent a selection of the vituperatives to amuse me! Some of them were funny enough, particularly the really furious ones, but my principal feeling on reading them was one of extreme irritation that people could be so absolutely idiotic. I am willing to admit that, as a nation, we have never been especially good at recognising satire, but the satire of 'Don't Let's Be Beastly to the Germans' was surely not all that subtle. I must be more careful in future and double dot my i's and treble cross my t's.

Went up to see Oswald. He looked terribly thin and hollow but has now quite definitely a good chance of recovery.

After a quiet dinner at G.H. I took off at ten-thirty in a Dakota. The aerodrome was floodlit from various points high up on the Rock which made the aeroplanes on the tarmac look transparent like gossamer. David Woodford saw me off as John and Tony were playing bridge with H.E. I wriggled myself into a comfortable position on some sacking and baggage in the fore part of the plane; stuffed up my ears, took some seconal and went to sleep.

October 9th

The shades were taken off the windows at about six o'clock and so I woke up and looked out. A lovely, misty autumn morning. We flew low over the Bristol channel and the green hills of Somerset; the sun began to dispel

the mist and mark the long shadows of trees across the fields. I looked back in my mind over the last crowded three months; the seas and mountains and deserts I had crossed; the strange, moving sights I had seen. I thought of all the thousands of men I had talked to in camps, ships, canteens, airports and hospitals, and realised how much it would mean to any one of them to be looking at what I was looking at now, the familiar, gentle English countryside, still, after four years of war, waking peacefully to an autumn day.

I remembered so many moments both gay and sad; so many different voices and faces and handshakes. I had seen much homesickness and loneliness but no bitterness; much suffering but no despair and, shining through it all, the same unconquerable spirit. I remembered also and will always remember my own personal gratitude to all those men for giving me, quite unwittingly, renewed pride in the traditions and ideals of my country and renewed hope for the human race, for as long as such courage as theirs can emerge out of chaos, and for as long as such endurance as theirs can so supremely transcend suffering and adversity, whatever strains and stresses the future may hold for us, we shall still have a chance.

The pilot began to make preparations for landing, the plane circled lower and lower over the airfield, and England came closer.

